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October 25, 1887.

Vol. XXI.

\$2.50
a Year.PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY BEADLE AND ADAMS,
No. 98 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.Price,
5 Cents.

No. 535.

THE BUCKSKIN ROVERS



OR,

The Prairie Fugitive.

A Texan Romance, and Companion
Story to "Brothers in Buckskin,"
and "The Buckskin Bowers."

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

CHAPTER I.

A SOLDIER TO THE RESCUE.

ALONG the banks of the Rio Grande River,
the great water boundary line between Mexico
and the United States, two persons were dash-
ing, at the utmost speed of their horses.

That they were Mexicans their darkly-bronzed
complexions, intensely black eyes and raven-

AS THE DARING SOLDIER SWAM TO THE RESCUE, HE RAISED HIS HEAVY REVOLVERS,
ONE IN EACH HAND, AND FIRED UPON THE COMANCHES RAPIDLY.

hued hair indicated, as their attire did that they belonged to the upper walks of life.

One of the two was a woman, or rather a young and beautiful girl, with a form that showed off well in her handsome riding-habit.

Her eyes were large and lustrous, and her face flushed from her rapid exercise, while her hair, loosened from its coils, floated out far behind her in heavy, waving masses.

Her companion was a young man with a handsome face, which was, however, marred by dissipation, though he could scarcely have been over twenty-one years of age.

He was evidently a Mexican *caballero*, and rode his horse with the air of one born for the saddle.

They were both well-mounted, and, as they sped along, they urged their horses to greater speed, the maiden by sharp lashes with her gold-handled whip and the gentleman with his heavy spurs.

They were upon the Mexican shore of the Rio Grande, and the cause of this great haste was evident, when into view, not very far behind them dashed a party of horsemen.

These horsemen were Comanche Indians, who were urging their fleet ponies in hot chase and steadily gaining upon the two they pursued.

Should they capture them the fate of the young people was sealed, and bitter indeed would it be.

"We must take to the river, *Senor Ramon*, for they will not dare follow us across to American soil," decided the maiden, as her tired horse stumbled, and a glance behind her showed that the Indians would overtake them before another half mile had been passed over.

"Comanches dare go anywhere, *Senorita Celina*, and there is no ford near," was the young horseman's response.

"We must take the river if there is no ford. Better drown than fall into the hands of those demons," and the maiden shuddered.

"I agree with you," was the curt reply, and then the horseman added:

"There is a good place to take to the water."

"Then there we take it," was the firm decision of the plucky girl.

The spot indicated was a place where the bank sloped toward the river, leaving a leap of only a few feet into the water; elsewhere it was a cliff of considerable height.

The two fugitives rode directly for the low bank.

Side by side they went, and, with a spring, their horses went over into the Rio Grande.

Down beneath the turbid waters they sunk, and the maiden shivered as the flood swept over her horse; but the gallant animals arose quickly and headed for the other shore.

A few moments after the Comanches dashed up to the bank, and seeing the fugitives, without hesitation plunged into the river in pursuit.

For some reason the horse ridden by the maiden did not seem to swim as well as the animal which the young Mexican rode, and the latter was some distance ahead.

"Don't leave me, *Senor Ramon*," came the pleading cry from the lips, now white with fear.

The man looked back, and his experience told him that the horse ridden by the maiden could not last across the river.

He also knew that his own horse could not bear a double weight.

If he turned back for the girl it would fret and tire the animal he rode far more, and perhaps he might not be able to reach the other shore.

If he placed the maiden in his saddle, while he swam, the Comanches would most assuredly overtake and capture him.

His face whitened under the peril of the situation, and the struggle between his cowardice and courage.

Then he decided, for he called back:

"I cannot force my horse back, *Senorita Celina*, so urge yours forward all you can."

"Save yourself, *Senor Ramon Delporte*, and do not mind me!" was the cutting response.

"My God! what can I do? Nothing!"

As she spoke the maiden let go her bridle-rein and clasped her hands in prayer, for she felt that her horse was sinking, and her companion was deserting her.

But, suddenly, a shot rung out from the American shore, and a horseman, in the uniform of the United States Cavalry service, dashed into the river and swam rapidly toward them.

The shot had emptied an Indian saddle, and, as the daring soldier swam to the rescue, he raised his heavy revolvers, one in each hand, and fired upon the Comanches rapidly, and with deadly aim.

CHAPTER II.

FLUNG IN HIS TEETH.

THERE were fully a score of Comanches in pursuit of the two Mexicans, and yet, unaided, the gallant American soldier had dashed to the rescue.

The Indians recognized the United States uniform, and suspected that the dashing officer had soldiers hiding in the thicket on the American shore, so they decided to give up the chase.

They, however, sent showers of arrows at the fugitives and the officer in revenge for having lost their captives, and to avenge, if they could, the death of two of their comrades who had fallen under the unerring revolver-shots of the American.

One of the arrows struck the struggling horse of the maiden, and with a wild plunge he sunk beneath the waters, dragging his fair rider with him.

But hardly had she disappeared, when the American officer left his saddle and dove after her, for he was within a few feet of her.

He grasped her in his arms, found that her foot was caught in the stirrup, and releasing it, rose to the surface with her in almost an instant of time.

His horse had turned back for the shore, but was fortunately within reach, and the maiden was at once placed in the saddle just as the Mexican, who had now turned back, as he saw that the Indians had done so, called out:

"I will save you, *Senorita Celina*."

The maiden was perfectly conscious, and she had not lost her presence of mind, and said, quickly:

"I am saved, *Senor Delporte*, and need not your aid now."

Then she said to the American in broken English:

"Ah, *senor*, I cannot take your horse and leave you here."

"I am a fine swimmer, *senorita*, and can readily follow you, so head for the shore," he returned in Spanish.

"The *senor* can grasp the end of my sash, and my horse will pull him ashore," said the Mexican, who now approached.

"No, thank you, *Senor Mexican*, I accept no aid from a coward, for such you proved yourself to desert that lady, be you brother, lover or husband to her," came the cutting response flung in the teeth of the Mexican.

The American had spoken in a low tone, yet it reached the ears of the maiden, as the soldier's horse swam shoreward with her, for the noble brute seemed to understand what he had to do, and she could not check him.

At the stinging words, the face of the young Mexican flushed and then turned pale, and through his shut teeth came the response:

"We shall meet again, *Senor Americano*, for that insult."

"As you please, *Senor Mexicano*," was the reply, and the officer swam shoreward, whither the other had already preceded him.

As the maiden reached the bank she sprang to the ground, and turning the horse, urged him again into the water to go to the aid of his master.

Seeing this, the American gave a call, and the intelligent steed at once swam out to meet him, though the brave swimmer did not really need his aid.

In the mean time, *Ramon Delporte* had reached the shore and said haughtily:

"Come, *senorita*, mount my horse and I will walk by your side to the ford some miles below, and there I can doubtless get a horse."

"Come, you are wet, so let us be off."

"*Senor Ramon*, I am not as ungrateful as you deem me, for I will await the coming of that noble man to whom I owe my life, yes, and you also, for those Comanches would have crossed and captured you too, but for the American."

"Bah! they were already turning back when he came."

"It is not true; but here he is," and stepping forward as the American left the water, she held out her hand while she said:

"*Senor*, I am *Senorita Celina Velasquez*, and I wish to ask you your name, that my father may seek you out to offer you the gratitude of his heart for your noble act, as I now offer my warmest thanks to you."

She spoke earnestly and tears were in her eyes, and seeing them the officer returned in a light tone:

"Ah, *senorita*, the thought that I saved you is my recompense, so spare your thanks, and I am happy that I was hunting near and thus able to serve you."

"But may I ask you, and your escort, to ac-

company me to the fort, for there you can obtain dry clothing from the wives of the officers, and I will be glad to extend any courtesy to the *senor*."

The words were spoken coldly, when they referred to the Mexican, and he said haughtily:

"No I thank you, *Senor Americano*, we—"

"My name is *Willis Loring*, *senor*, and I am a lieutenant of cavalry," was the quiet interruption.

"Then, *Senor Lieutenant Willis Loring*, we will continue on our way to this lady's home, with thanks to you, however."

"The *senorita* should not remain so long in her wet clothing, and the fort is but two miles away, while the hacienda of her father must certainly be four leagues from here, there being none nearer that I have heard of."

"I shall accept your kind invitation, *Senor Loring*, for I am nearly chilled," said the fair Mexican.

"You may do so, *Senorita Celina*, but I shall return to Mexico," hotly said the Mexican.

"You are your own master, *senor*, and I claim the right to do as I deem best; so shall go to the fort."

"Pray tell my parents I will return by night-fall."

The Mexican's face flushed with anger and with an oath muttered between his teeth, he rode away down the river, while Lieutenant Loring raised the maiden to a seat upon his horse, behind his saddle, and mounting rode away at a canter.

A warm welcome met the beautiful girl at the fort, and she was quickly cared for by the wives of the officers, who were anxious to do all in their power for her.

But as soon as her clothing had been dried, she started for her home, the handsome lieutenant serving as her escort, accompanied by half a dozen of his cavalymen.

Crossing the river it was nightfall when they reached the home of *Celina Velasquez*, and the young officer was readily persuaded to remain to supper.

On his way back he mused of his romantic meeting with the girl, and about her story of herself.

She was the daughter of proud parents, but they were poor, and as *Ramon Delporte* was the son of a man who possessed vast riches, they were anxious to have the *Senorita Celina* become his wife.

Caring for no one else, and admiring the handsome young *ranchero*, in spite of his wild life, *Celina Velasquez* made no resistance to becoming the *Senora Delporte*, and it was so believed she would become, though the Mexican had not yet asked her to be his wife.

They had ridden out that morning, when they so nearly lost their lives, in company with the *Senor Velasquez*, who had decided to go on further and purchase some cattle he heard were for sale, so had sent them back to the hacienda together.

They had turned from the direct trail and thus had come upon the band of marauding Comanches, which had put them to flight.

The story of her parents and herself *Celina* had told *Willis Loring*, as they rode along together, though she had spoken of *Ramon Delporte* only as a friend, which indeed thus far he had been.

And, on his way back to the fort the soldier had congratulated himself over and over again that he had been able to save the life of the lovely girl, and had often asked himself the question:

"Is there aught between that coward Mexican and her, I wonder?"

Ramon Delporte had stopped at the hacienda and told of their escape from the Comanches to the parents of *Celina*, for her father had just returned home, and he had said that he had gone to the fort to get dry clothing and would soon follow.

But not a word had he said of their lives having been saved by Lieutenant Loring, but left the impression that they had ridden into the river and American soldiers on the other shore had prevented the red-skins from following them.

Then he had gone on to his home.

But from the lips of *Celina* her parents had heard all, and that *Ramon Delporte* had intended leaving her to her fate but for the coming of the American officer.

CHAPTER III.

THE BUCKSKIN BROTHERS.

LIEUTENANT WILLIS LORING was one of the most gallant young officers on the Texan border.

Handsome, the descendant of an old aristocratic Florida family, and possessing a snug little fortune of his own, he was considered a good "catch" in army circles.

He had, however, reached his thirtieth year without having been won by any fair maid, and he often said that he never intended to become a Benedict.

He preferred an adventurer's life upon the border, where there was a chance to win fame, than duty where there would be nothing to break the monotony of a life in barracks.

Since his arrival upon the border, he had several times distinguished himself, in engagements with the Indians, and was commanding his company of cavalry at the time that he was so fortunately near as to save the fair Celina from a fearful fate.

He had been out hunting alone, as was often his wont, when he had seen the fugitives flying from the Comanches, and, without counting odds against him, had daringly gone to the rescue.

Since his meeting with Celina Velasquez, and feeling that she owed her life to him, he could not drive her from his thoughts, and several days after the rescue the thought entered his mind that it would be but politeness for him to ride over the river to the hacienda of the Senor Velasquez, and ask about his daughter's health, after all she had passed through.

He did not wish to take an escort of soldiers, so decided to ask two persons then at the fort whom he most highly esteemed, to accompany him.

These two were in fact Texan rancheroes, dwelling upon their ranch many miles away from the fort, and yet men who were noted as the best scouts and most daring Indian-fighters upon the plains.

Whenever there was danger of an Indian raid, these two somehow gleaned the knowledge ahead of all others, and were wont to warn the fort and the settlements.

Thus it was that they became known as scouts, and the commandants of the various outposts were always glad to secure their services when they could do so, as scouts, guides, or Indian trailers.

They had gone to the Texan border from the East, so it was said, and their mother had accompanied them, facing all the dangers of frontier life to be with her two noble boys.

With several faithful servants who had gone with her, the mother was wont to remain at the ranch and help to build up a comfortable home for her "boys," as she called them, while they roamed the prairies, captured wild horses, and acted as guards against the settlements and ranches being surprised by the Indians.

On the border they had won several names, being called the "Buckskin Brothers," the "Powell Pards," and, individually, "Night Hawk" and "Broncho Bill," but their names were George and William Powell.*

Two finer specimens of manhood are seldom met with, and the fame they had won as dead-shots, trailers, riders, and for undaunted courage was well deserved.

Lieutenant Loring had several times gone on scouts with them, and always did he meet with success under their guidance, so that he had become greatly attached to them.

Their manners were gentle, almost womanly, they never spoke of their own deeds, and, ever genial, they were general favorites.

Night Hawk George was the larger of the two, and his strength was wonderful, while he was a silent man and a trifle stern in manner.

Broncho Bill was strangely like his brother, and yet there was a vein of fun in his nature that found vent in various ways, while his bright blue eyes seemed ever to twinkle with mischief.

Each brother knew that he could trust the other to the death, and either one felt safe in any danger when the other was near at hand.

Such were the two men whom Lieutenant Loring decided to ask to go with him to the hacienda of Senor Velasquez.

He found them in the little cabin which they always occupied when at the fort, and they greeted the officer pleasantly, for they greatly admired him.

"George, I have come to ask you and Will to accompany me on a little jaunt over the river, as I am desirous of seeing if that young lady I rescued the other day suffered from the shock and her cold bath."

"I will go with pleasure, Lieutenant Loring," responded Night Hawk.

"That settles it for me, too, lieutenant," responded Broncho Bill.

"I do not care to take any of my men, so will let it go as a hunting trip."

"All right, sir; but I would advise that you go in buckskin and not in uniform, in case we should meet some quarrelsome Mexicans, you know, for they hate to see Americans cross the river."

"You are right, Night Hawk, and I will do so."

"When will you be ready?"

"Now."

"Well, we will start within the hour."

Soon after the three, well mounted and armed, rode away from the fort, and they took the trail leading toward the Rio Grande River.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CHALLENGE.

THE trio of horsemen had reached the ford of the Rio Grande, which would lead them nearest to the hacienda of Senor Velasquez, when they suddenly spied four mounted men crossing the river toward the American shore.

"Who are they?" asked Lieutenant Loring, as both Night Hawk and Broncho Bill leveled their field glasses upon them.

"Mexican gentlemen and their attendants, from their dress," Night Hawk responded.

They waited until the Mexicans crossed and saw that the two in advance were handsomely dressed, and without doubt gentlemen.

The two following a few paces behind them were peon servants.

The scouts and the officer saluted politely, and returning the salutations one of the party asked:

"May I inquire the distance to the American fort, senors, and the trail that leads thither?"

"That trail will lead you to the fort, senor, and it is four miles from here."

"Are you from there?" asked the Mexican, addressing Night Hawk Powell who had answered him.

"Yes, senor."

"I would know if the Senor Lieutenant Loring is now at the fort?"

Night Hawk glanced toward the officer, who promptly said:

"I am Lieutenant Loring, senor."

"Ah, senor, meeting with you saves me a ride, for we were going to see you."

"Indeed, and may I ask the names of my visitors and the nature of their visit?" and Lieutenant Loring half suspected what the response would be as to their errand.

"I am Senor Altar Guaymas, a captain of Mexican Lanceros, and my comrade permit me to introduce as Senor Fronteras, senor."

Lieutenant Loring bowed and returned, "Permit me to present my friends, the Senors Powell, gentlemen."

All bowed, the scouts wondering what this visit of the Mexicans meant.

But they were not kept long in suspense, as Captain Altar Guaymas very quickly said:

"Senor Lieutenant, I have a message from my friend, Senor Ramon Delporte."

"Ah, the gentleman who did not like my words to him the other day?" was the cool query.

"Yes, senor."

"I do not wonder, for I spoke as I thought, and my thoughts were somewhat bitter toward him."

"The Senor Delporte considers that you insulted him."

"I do not wonder, for I meant to."

"And I am requested to visit you and bear a demand that you give him satisfaction as a soldier and a gentleman, but shall I wait until you are in uniform?"

"Oh no, pray don't, senor, for the man's the same, even in buckskin, and I am not on official duty to-day."

"Then, senor, I demand a meeting from you with my friend, the Senor Ramon Delporte."

"What is his grievance, senor?"

"An insult."

"Ah yes; but will he not let it remain as it is, for in his own heart he must feel that I said just what he deserved?"

"I am authorized to demand satisfaction, senor, and as an American officer I suppose you will hardly dare refuse."

"See here, Senor Captain Guaymas, I need not be prompted as to what an American officer should do."

"I am opposed to dueling, and I could refuse to meet Senor Delporte upon the grounds that I consider him unmanly and an arrant coward; but I shall not do so, as I feel that he is one who would force me to some harsh measure."

"So I will meet your friend, senor, when and where you please."

"I am glad to hear the senor say that, and I would ask him where Senor Fronteras and myself can arrange with the friends whom it will please him to select?"

"Right here, Senor Guaymas, if my friends will be kind enough to serve me in the matter."

"With pleasure, sir," responded Night Hawk.

"Certainly," added Broncho Bill.

The Mexicans bowed haughtily, and all dismounted, the four seconds walking apart, while Lieutenant Loring quietly lighted a cigar and stood gazing at the wild scenery about him.

It did not take George and Will Powell long to arrange a matter of that kind, and they soon joined the lieutenant, while the Mexicans, with a salute, mounted their horses and rode back to the ford, crossing over into their own country.

"Well, pards?" asked Lieutenant Loring, as the two ranchero-scouts joined him.

"I know your skill as a swordsman, lieutenant, so I made it blades," Night Hawk said.

"With revolvers in reserve should blades fail," added Broncho Bill.

"That suits me."

"But time and place?"

"To-morrow morning at eight o'clock, over yonder on the Mexican shore, in that clump of mesquites," and Night Hawk pointed out a little clump of trees a mile away.

"We will be first upon the spot, lieutenant, and as we have the ford near, and open country for a mile around the place, no large force can creep upon us, you see, and I am always a trifle cautious in dealing with Mexicans."

"You are right, Broncho Bill," returned Lieutenant Loring with a laugh.

"But now let us go on to the hacienda where dwells the fair Celina Velasquez," and mounting their horses they crossed the river into Mexico.

CHAPTER V.

AN OFFER AND A THREAT.

IT was a surprise to beautiful Celina Velasquez, when she looked up from her book, as she was reclining in her hammock, swung upon the veranda of her home, and whiling away the time in reading, to behold three horsemen approaching the hacienda.

In spite of his buckskin attire and broad sombrero, she recognized in one of them the handsome soldier who had saved her from the Comanches.

Her face flushed with pleasure, and she sprung from the hammock to give him and his friends greeting, while she also called a peon servant and sent him to inform her parents of the coming of guests.

Senor Velasquez greeted the visitors with cordiality, as did also his wife; but in their hearts there was a feeling against the officer that he had driven Ramon Delporte out of the heart of their daughter.

They felt most grateful to the American, as they knew that they owed him deepest gratitude for all he had done; but then Ramon Delporte was supposed to be the only heir of his very rich father, and the Velasquez were poor.

Then, too, they were not fond of Americans, anyhow.

But refreshments and wine were ordered, and after a pleasant hour passed at the hacienda the three Americans mounted their horses and rode away, leaving the Mexicans to discuss them at their leisure.

"It was most kind in Lieutenant Loring to come so far to make inquiries about my health, when Senor Ramon Delporte, who lives but a few miles away, has not done so," said Celina Velasquez, after the trio had departed.

"You angered Senor Ramon in some way, my child," said the Senor Velasquez.

"I was the one to feel angry, father."

"But he did not act right, and his guilty conscience alone must be his excuse for his submitting tamely to the insult which the American officer cast in his teeth."

"He was angry, too, because I cared not to ride twenty miles in my wet clothing, and accepted the invitation of Senor Loring to go to the fort."

"My child, the Senor Ramon loves you, and he explained to me that he was unable to force his horse back to your aid, and was just about to spring into the water and swim to your succor when the American appeared upon the scene."

"Senor Ramon is a brave man, and a very rich one, and I told him months ago, if he would reform his wild ways, he should have you for his wife."

Celina Velasquez laughed lightly and went back to her hammock and her book; but in her heart she felt a deep contempt for her Mexican lover.

* The heroes of many a romance of frontier life, and now residents of La Crosse, Wisconsin.—THE AUTHOR.

Hardly had she resumed her place in the hammock when she beheld five horsemen approaching.

"It is old Senor Delporte and his peon guard," she said.

The visitor was a Mexican with gray hair, and the appearance of a man who had passed his three-score mile-post.

He was elegantly dressed however, wore rare jewels and seemed to be an old dandy.

He was received with the greatest show of consideration by Senor Velasquez, as he alighted with the aid of his peons, and invited into the hacienda.

The Senor Velasquez was wondering at the visit of the rich old ranchero, for seldom was it that he had ever come to the hacienda before, and he said:

"I will call my wife and the Senorita Celina, senor, to help entertain you, for they will be delighted at the honor of your visit.

Celina had run to her room when she spied the old ranchero coming, and her mother had gone after her to have a talk with her about Ramon Delporte.

As the Senor Velasquez was about to leave the room to call his wife and daughter, Senor Delporte detained him with:

"No, a talk first with you, Senor Velasquez."

Senor Velasquez ordered wine and refreshments, and then sat near his guest, who quickly said:

"Senor Velasquez, you are not a rich man, I believe?"

"No, senor, I am poor, for somehow life has been hard with me."

"Your own fault, for you have speculated without judgment; but I believe you value your ranch and cattle here, with this hacienda and furniture at seventy-five thousand dollars?"

"That is what it is valued at, senor," said the surprised Velasquez, whose pride would have shown itself had a less rich man than the ranchero addressed him thus.

"That is what it is all mortgaged for, you mean?"

"Well, yes, senor, all I have is mortgaged."

"And the mortgage is due within the month?"

"Yes, senor."

"How do you expect to pay it?"

"I cannot; but I can pay the interest and renew for a year."

"You have done that now for twelve years?"

"Yes, senor," was the answer, and Senor Velasquez found it hard to keep his temper.

"You have not cut the mortgage down a peso in that time?"

"No, I have been unable to do so."

"I see; but let me tell you, Senor Velasquez, that the holder of your mortgages, on land, hacienda, furniture and stock was on his last legs, and he sold all to me for just seventy-five thousand cash."

"Ah, senor!" and Velasquez turned pale, for he knew not what was coming.

"You have a beautiful daughter, I believe?"

"Yes, senor."

"I have seen her often, and she is beautiful and most lovable."

"My son is her lover, I believe?"

"Well, yes, senor."

"He has asked you for her hand?"

"He has."

"And you consented?"

"Yes, senor."

"He has not a dollar but what I give him."

"So I hear, senor."

"And what he gambles for."

"I have heard that he gambles."

"And yet you would give your daughter to such a wild scamp as he is?"

"He pledged me to reform."

"Bah! he'll never reform, and he is worse than you think, for he gets money in most questionable ways."

"Within the month he will be of age, and I shall cut him off from all support."

"I shall pay his debts up to that date, give him a thousand pesos, and let him go."

"Never shall he have another peso from me, Senor Velasquez."

Senor Velasquez turned pale.

Then the visitor continued:

"Now, senor, I own all you are supposed to possess, and I will give the mortgages into your hands entire, with ten thousand pesos in cash, if you will give me your daughter in marriage."

"Refuse, senor, and I sell you out."

"Such is my offer, such my terms, and if you consent I will make your child a good husband, and when I die, which will be in a few years at best, I shall leave her every peso I possess."

"I await your answer, Senor Velasquez, and the answer of your child!"

CHAPTER VI.

SACRIFICED.

SEÑOR VELASQUEZ was almost dumb with amazement at the offer of the old ranchero, and the threat that followed it.

He knew not what to say.

He had never liked Ramon Delporte, but had been willing to sacrifice his daughter to get out of his financial difficulties, as he saw his way clear to do so, he thought, if she became the Senora Delporte.

Now the father of the young profligate came with an offer of marriage, and more, said frankly that he meant to disinherit his son.

But, still more, he made a munificent offer of giving up to Senor Velasquez every mortgage against his property, with a present of ten thousand pesos thrown in.

It was some moments before Senor Velasquez could command himself to speak, and then he said:

"Senor, you are most generous, and I thank you."

"I will speak with my wife and daughter at once, and if you will content yourself until my return I will be thankful."

With some rare old wine before him and a fragrant cigarrito, the old Mexican was content, and so Senor Velasquez hastened to his daughter's room.

Her mother was there with her, impressing upon her the fallacy of allowing her heart to yearn for an American lover, when a rich and handsome young Mexican sued for her hand.

Then the senor appeared, and he was all excitement.

"My child, I would ask you," he said with trembling voice, "if you would see your father ruined if it was in your hand to save him?"

"Ah, father, you know that I would not."

"But what has happened?" and both Celina and her mother turned pale.

"My child, nothing has happened, but Wilberon, the money-lender, who held mortgages on every peso of property that I own, as you and your mother know, has gone to the wall, and the claims were bought up for their full value by Senor Delporte, who now holds them."

"And he will give them to Celina, if she will marry his son?" cried the senora, eagerly.

"Nothing of the kind, wife, but he will give them to me, with ten thousand pesos in cash, if Celina will marry him."

"Who?"

"The Senor Delporte."

"Not his son!" almost shrieked the senora.

"No, the old man."

Celina gave a low moan and dropped into the chair from which, in her excitement, she had arisen.

Both the father and mother gazed upon her, and after an effort of self-control she asked in a whisper:

"If I refuse, father, to be sacrificed for gold?"

"Then within the month we will be turned out of our home."

"And Senor Ramon?"

"Is to be cast off when he becomes of age this month, and never more acknowledged by his father, who as much as says that he is a scamp."

"Celina is seventeen, and the Senor Delporte is seventy," the senora said.

"Yes, but he will die soon, as he says, and Celina will get all."

"Come, my child, will you save us?"

For a long time Celina did not answer.

Her heart was full, her brain was reeling.

Her dreams of love faded away, and she consented to save her parents from poverty.

She said:

"Father, I am willing to be sold, so take me to Senor Delporte, that I may tell him so?"

And tell him she did, in a low, sad tone, yet with no word of regret or reproach escaping her lips.

When a day had been appointed for the wedding, and it was set off but two weeks, the old man mounted his horse, and, accompanied by his peon guard, rode away.

Watching him until he was out of sight, Celina Delporte walked off by herself in the woodland surrounding the hacienda, and took a seat upon a fallen tree, a favorite resort of hers.

She had been there but a short while when she heard hoof-falls, and a moment after Ramon Delporte arrived in sight, riding at a rapid gallop.

He spied her where she sat, and rode directly up to the tree and sprang off.

His face was pale, his look sinister, and he said as he doffed his sombrero:

"This is a great pleasure, Senorita Celina, to find you here, for I was on my way to have a talk with you."

"Indeed, senor?"

"I had supposed you had forgotten me, as you failed to call and inquire after my health, although you well knew what I had passed through."

"I am glad that you thought of me, and I should have called, I grant."

"But I have been much engrossed, and also worried, and such are my excuses."

"Are you enjoying your usual health?"

"Yes, senor."

"And, senorita, let me say to you that I have come to tell you how dear you are to me, how deeply I love you, and to ask you if my regard for you is appreciated by you to that extent that will permit you to be my wife?"

"Your father and mother granted me their consent, senorita, to make you my wife, and I have shown to you that I loved you, and have felt that you cared for me."

"Now I ask you to be my wife, and forgive me for what you deemed neglect the other day for your safety, for, upon my honor, I could not manage my horse."

She had risen and now looked at him straight in the eyes.

She had listened to every word that he said, and had he looked into her face he would have seen there only contempt for him.

Then she spoke, and the words cut him like a knife:

"Senor Ramon, your father left here one hour ago, and, as he did me the honor to ask me to become his wife, I consented, so it has been arranged that I am to become your step-mother. That is all the answer I have to make you."

He was livid now, and his eyes blazed with fury.

"Has that old man, in his dotage, asked you to marry him?" he hissed forth.

"He has, and within two weeks I will be the Senora Delporte!"

"Curses! it shall not be!"

"Pardon me, but it shall be, for there is too much at stake in our household to permit the failure of the transaction."

"I will prevent it, and more, I have heard that that accursed American was here to see you to-day, and I will have it so that he has paid his last call upon you. Adios, Senorita Celina Velasquez, and understand that you have made a wicked foe in Ramon Delporte, for I know that you love the accursed American, and marry my old father for his money. Adios!"

With a bound he was in his saddle, and darted away, leaving Celina Velasquez standing by the fallen tree and gazing after him with a smile of bitter contempt upon her beautiful face.

CHAPTER VII.

TREASON IN THE AIR.

AFTER his visit to the hacienda with Night Hawk and Broncho Bill, Lieutenant Loring and the scouts set off on their return to the fort.

They passed through the mesquite motte, and Broncho Bill suggested that, to be sure and prevent any treachery, if the Mexicans intended any, he should remain there in camp.

"You can go on to the fort, get your weapons and return to-night, so as to be on hand early and have plenty of time to rest, lieutenant, while I remain here, and if any one approaches, I will cross the river and meet you and George there."

This was considered the best plan, and while Broncho Bill remained among the mesquites, Night Hawk and Lieutenant Loring went into the fort.

They shot some game as they went along, and arrived after nightfall.

After supper they mounted their horses, and with a pair of handsome rapiers which belonged to the lieutenant they set out upon their return to the Mexican side of the river.

It was midnight when they crossed the Rio Grande, and ascending the bank on the other side they suddenly came upon a horseman.

It was Broncho Bill, and he recognized the two as quickly as they did him.

"What's up, Will?" asked George.

"Oh I saw nine Mexicans coming and concluded I'd quit."

"Nine?"

"Yes."

"Who were they?"

"Some gang I believe sent there by the party we are to meet, for they were on foot, so as to leave no trail."

"They mean mischief?"

"Certainly."

"What is to be done?" asked Lieutenant Loring.

"Go into camp further down the river, and keep watch in the morning until we see the Senor Delporte and his seconds approaching the mesquites, and Will can head them off and ask what it means?" said Night Hawk.

"Yes, I will tell them that I know there are nine men hidden in the mesquites, and that they went there on foot last night."

"If they wish to meet the lieutenant, tell them to come to the river bank here, unless they drive those nine men off," Night Hawk said.

So it was arranged, Lieutenant Loring congratulating Broncho Bill on his far-sightedness in wishing to remain in the mesquites, for he felt that treachery was at the bottom of those nine men being there.

"I could expose this to Mexicans of honor, be they ranchers or officers of the army, and refuse to meet Delporte, and they would uphold me in it and disown him."

"But he is one that I have come to dread as I would a snake, and so I shall meet him," said Lieutenant Loring.

And so the party rode to a camping-place near, the horses were staked out, and all were fast asleep in a very short while, for the scouts felt that they had no cause to dread danger in the place they had selected for their camp.

About dawn they awoke and soon had cooked a substantial breakfast.

Then they took up a position from whence they could command a view of the approach to the clump of mesquites, and Broncho Bill suggested that he should cross the river and be ready to ride toward Delporte and his companions, when Night Hawk should signal him of their coming.

This was decided upon, and hardly had Broncho Bill been ten minutes in his place of waiting when Night Hawk gave him a signal.

Instantly he mounted and rode up to the top of the river-bank.

Far off he saw five horsemen approaching, and their destination was toward the mesquites.

"Five of them, are they?"

"Well, we don't care, so they don't join the nine in the timber, for fourteen would be rather too many for a pleasant meeting."

"But I cannot believe that the Mexican captain and his friend can wink at treachery in this matter, and from what the lieutenant told us of Delporte, he must be the one who is playing the game against us."

So saying, Broncho Bill rode at a canter to head the five horsemen off ere they reached the grove of mesquites.

The party of horsemen soon saw him coming, and, as he waved to them they came to a halt, Night Hawk and the lieutenant watching the meeting with deep interest, and ready to dash to the aid of Broncho Bill if he needed it.

"There comes one of the men we saw yesterday, for I recognize him," said Captain Guaymas.

"Yes, and he is doubtless coming to tell us that the American dare not meet me," Ramon Delporte responded with a scowl.

"Oh, no; that American officer has a face that is utterly fearless, Delporte."

"I rather liked him," Captain Guaymas returned.

"And so did I; but perhaps something has prevented the meeting for to-day," Senor Fronteras rejoined.

"I sincerely hope not," Delporte returned, and all waited the coming of Broncho Bill, the two others of the party having villainous-looking peons, who acted as servants to Senor Delporte.

In a short while Broncho Bill rode up. His face wore its usual pleasant smile, but his eyes were as watchful as a hawk's, and his hands were kept as if by accident, conveniently near his revolvers.

"Senors, good-morning," he said courteously. They all returned his salutation, and Captain Guaymas asked:

"Has aught prevented Lieutenant Loring from keeping his appointment for this morning, senor?"

"Oh no, Senor Captain, he is ready to keep it, only we did not care to face a small army upon Mexican soil."

"These peons are Senor Delporte's servants, who carry his weapons, and will aid him, in case he is wounded, senor," replied the Mexican captain.

"It is well for an army to go well supplied with hospital attaches, Senor Captain; but what is the garrison in the mesquites yonder for?"

As he spoke Broncho Bill addressed Captain Guaymas, though his eyes turned quickly upon Ramon Delporte.

"I thought so," he muttered as he saw the young Mexican start and change color.

This little by-play was not observed by the others, and Captain Guaymas responded:

"I am at a loss to understand you, senor."

"And are you also, Senor Delporte?" asked Broncho Bill with a wicked smile.

"I certainly am," was the angry retort.

"Well, permit me to explain, senor, that last night a party of nine men on foot went into yonder mesquite motte and are now in hiding there, I am sure."

"Can this be possible, Senor Americano?" asked Captain Guaymas with amazement.

"I hope, senor, that you cannot believe that we know aught of them," Fronteras added.

"It is possible, senor, and it is true; but I assure you, on your part, I believe you in no way connected with it," and Broncho Bill looked at the two seconds as he spoke, and not at Ramon Delporte.

Then he added:

"You will understand, senors, why we did not care to meet you in the mesquites, but we are at your service if you will come to the river-bank yonder."

"I do not believe there is any one there, and if so, I will soon get rid of them, I assure you."

"Wait for me here, senors," and Ramon Delporte, calling to one of the peons to accompany him, rode off toward the mesquite motte, leaving Broncho Bill, with his two seconds and the other peon to await his return.

"Shall we not accompany you, Delporte?" called out Captain Guaymas.

"Oh, no, for I wish the senor to see that he is mistaken, and if there should be any one there I will drive them off, for that is the place for the meeting in view," and so saying Ramon Delporte rode on at a canter, his face black as a thundercloud, and his lips firmly set.

CHAPTER VIII.

TRAITOR TO FRIEND AND FOE.

WHEN Ramon Delporte had ridden out of hearing of the group, who watched his going and awaited the result, he said to his peon servant, who rode close behind him, and without looking around:

"Andras, how is this?"

"It's bad, senor."

"That accursed American suspects me."

"He seemed to do so, senor."

"You selected men whom you could trust?"

"Oh, yes, senor."

"And Vento?"

"He is in the secret, senor."

"Tell me just what you told the men."

"I told them, Senor Ramon, to seek the mesquite motte at midnight, and to go on foot, leaving their horses over in the old canyon with a guard."

"How many men were to go to the motte?"

"Nine, senor."

"And then?"

"They were to hide there in the thicket until the duel scene, when they were to fire upon the three Americans and the two Mexican senors."

"You told them not to make any mistake?"

"Oh yes, senor, they were to fire upon the others, for Vento and I were to stand near you and thus protect you."

"Then we were—Vento and me—to see if any did not fall dead, and to shoot them down, at the same time pretending to fire upon you, while you could run to your horse and make your escape."

"That was my plan, Andras, and I knew you had the pluck and mind to carry it out, while I did not care to be known in the matter to other than yourself and Vento."

"So I know, senor, and my comrades had orders to spare you, as I told them you were a good master and had saved Vento's life and mine."

"And the price?"

"They were to get the horses of the two Mexican senors, and the three Americans, their arms, and what valuables they had, with a thousand pesos, which I was to pay them the moment they had done their work, and you had escaped."

"Well, Andras, you have done well; but I fear me the plan will fail through that accursed American."

"Yes, senor, but there can be another plot arranged for the Americanos."

"And Senors Guaymas and Fronteras too, Andras, for I owe those two men very large sums of borrowed money, and the easiest way to cancel the debts is to have them killed by outlaws, you know."

"Yes, senor."

"Well, we are foiled to-day, and when we reach the motte you ride toward your friends and order them to depart, joining me before we leave the timber."

"Tell them that you have decided upon another plan, as their presence was suspected."

"And the duel, senor?"

"Oh, I must meet the American."

"He may kill you, senor?"

"No, for no man in Mexico handles a sword better than I do."

"I know, senor, but these Americans are perfect devils."

"Yes, Andras, and so am I when aroused."

"I have no dread of the result, and only regret we cannot wipe out the three of them and Fronteras and Guaymas also."

"It is too bad, senor; but another time."

"Yes, another time, good Andras," and as the treacherous Mexican, treacherous alike to friend and foe, spoke, the two reached the mesquite motte and disappeared within its dense foliage.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MEETING.

It was not Broncho Bill's nature to speak ill of a man behind his back, so he did not refer to his suspicions of Ramon Delporte's having played a double game, to the two Mexicans.

He had thwarted him in his little plot, and so was content.

That he had gone to the motte with his peon servant to warn those there that their plot was known, and to depart, he felt assured, and while conversing pleasantly with Senor Guaymas, he kept his eyes on the timber.

After the two had disappeared within its shadows, it flashed across his mind that perhaps after all he might have wronged Ramon Delporte.

But, remembering his cowardice, as Lieutenant Loring had told it, where Celina Velasquez was concerned, and her own words that her escort had deserted her in her time of greatest need, for so had she said to Night Hawk and himself when they went to the hacienda with the lieutenant, and recalling the guilty look of the Mexican when he had spoken of the nine men being in the mesquite motte, Broncho Bill felt that he had not after all been far wrong.

So he watched the timber closely, and soon saw the two men reappear where they had entered, while upon the other side, to his great joy, for it showed that he was not wrong, nine villainous-looking Mexicans walked away on the plain.

"You were right, senor, for there are your nine men; but who are they?" said Senor Fronteras.

"They look to me like outlaws, and if I had my lanceros here I would quickly make them give an account of themselves," the Mexican captain replied.

"They must be men from the ranches, however, as they would show fight to Senor Delporte, were they outlaws."

"They have been shirking duty by hiding," said Senor Fronteras, with no suspicion of wrong-doing against the man he called his friend.

Riding back to the party, Senor Ramon Delporte said, with a sneer:

"Senor Americano, there was nothing to fear from a gang of idle *vaqueros*, but I ordered them off for fear they might alarm you and your friends."

"Senor Delporte, you already have more on your hands with Lieutenant Loring, than I believe you can manage, so I advise you not to undertake the task of also wishing to kill me, and to avoid it, keep a more civil tongue in your head."

Broncho Bill smiled as he spoke; but it was a dangerous smile.

"Ah! you threaten, do you?"

"Perhaps, senor, we are in danger of meeting others than we expect?"

"No, senor, we are but three, as I supposed you were."

"But you're being five does not trouble me, though I did object to nine more."

"Come, senors, let us go on and settle the matter in hand," said Captain Guaymas, vexed that Delporte should have been insulting toward Broncho Bill.

"We will meet you, senor, at the mesquite motte," Broncho Bill replied, and he rode away toward the river, while the others continued on their way to the motte.

Reaching the river-bank, Broncho Bill was met by Night Hawk and the lieutenant, who

had crossed over to the Mexican side, and he quickly told them what had happened.

"I am more tempted not to spare that fellow," said Lieutenant Loring.

"He deserves killing," Night Hawk remarked, and he added:

"But can the others be in the plot with him, Will?"

"Oh, no, I am sure not, for they are honest gentlemen."

"But the peons may, for I saw glances pass between them and Delporte."

"It was a plot to kidnap us, or kill us, I guess, on the part of Delporte, and he hoped to win his seconds over I suppose; but he mistook his men, as Senors Guaymas and Fronteras are to be trusted wholly, I feel assured."

The three now rode forward toward the mesquite motte, and soon after entered it.

There was an open space there, and the ruins of an old adobe hut.

Here the Mexicans had halted and hitched their horses, and they saluted the lieutenant and the scouts as they rode up.

It looked to Broncho Bill, who narrowly observed them, that Delporte and his seconds had had some words.

But the trio of Americans dismounted, and Night Hawk and Captain Guaymas examined the weapons which each had brought, while Broncho Bill and Senor Fronteras selected the ground.

"If swords fail, as I understand it, senor, our principals are to resort to revolvers?" said Captain Guaymas.

"Yes, senor, at fifteen paces, and to advance at the word and fire as rapidly as they please, the word *fire* to quickly follow the order forward," answered Night Hawk.

The ground having been selected the duelists took their stands, Captain Guaymas having agreed that the superb rapiers brought by the other side should be used, as they were superior to his own, which Delporte had borrowed of him for the fight.

"They are beautiful weapons, senor," he had said, as he measured their lengths and tested them.

Senor Delporte seemed in ill-humor, for matters had not gone to his liking.

But there was determination in his face, this all saw, to show no mercy to his adversary.

He was noted as a splendid swordsman and there was not the shadow of a suspicion as to the result in his mind.

Lieutenant Loring on the other hand was calm, stern and conscious that he was face to face with death.

He knew his skill as a swordsman was the admiration of his brother officers, and when a cadet at West Point he had stood number one as a fencer, be it with any blade.

At the word given by Broncho Bill, who, with his usual luck had won the toss, the weapons slashed together.

It was a grand sight, yet a fearful one, to see those two splendid swordsmen fighting, the one for mastery the other to kill.

The more humane won the combat too, for he disarmed his antagonist to his utter amazement and chagrin.

Broncho Bill and Night Hawk's faces no longer wore an anxious look.

A smile passed over them, as their comrade struck the weapon from the hand of his foe.

"I hope the Senor Delporte will be content to accept the life I give him," said Lieutenant Loring coldly.

"No!" was the angry retort.

"I demand a meeting with revolvers, as was agreed," cried the furious Mexican.

Willis Loring's face flushed with anger, while he replied:

"Pardon me, senor, if I recall the fact that I saved your life a few days ago, and now give you your life which was in my hands."

"Will you not let it rest at this?"

"No, senor, if you are not a coward you will give me the satisfaction I demand!" was the savage retort.

"Pardon me, senor, but I think you owe me a meeting for your insulting words when you returned from the mesquite here."

"Let us settle that little affair before you again face Lieutenant Loring?" and Broncho Bill stepped forward and confronted Ramon Delporte.

CHAPTER X.

SOMETHING TO REMEMBER.

BRONCHO BILL suddenly taking up the affair to settle it, was a surprise to all.

But he acted from the fact that he feared that

Lieutenant Loring might not be as good a shot as he was a swordsman.

He had seen him shoot a rifle and shot-gun often, and knew that his aim was true, but he had never seen him fire a revolver when deadly aim meant win, and he had the thought that from Ramon Delporte's urging the matter after being disarmed, he was a shot of a dangerous kind.

So he stepped to the front to protect his friend, well knowing that he never missed, and intending not to kill the Mexican but to wing him.

The motive of Broncho Bill Night Hawk at once saw through, and with perfect confidence in his brother he said:

"Yes, let the senor meet my brother now, as he seems so anxious for another killing match."

"No, no, mine is the prior claim, as Senor Delporte asks it," said Willis Loring quickly, also understanding the kindly motives of the scouts.

Then Raymon Delporte settled the matter with:

"I demand the meeting now with Senor Loring, and afterward, if you are in the same humor, Senor Buckskin, I will accommodate you," and his reference to Broncho Bill as "Senor Buckskin" was intended as a slur at his suit of buckskin, for he little dreamed that the young scout was known by that name, and that neither he nor his brother were ashamed of it.

Then, too, there was that about Broncho Bill which Senor Delporte stood in awe of, and Andras the Peon had told him that he had heard of Broncho Bill as a very dangerous man to face in combat.

As this was the decision there was nothing to do but to arrange the preliminaries.

Then Senor Fronteras and Broncho Bill loaded the weapons, which were Night Hawk's, as they were selected to be used by the seconds, and Night Hawk and Captain Guaymas stepped off the ground.

Then the toss was made for the word and Night Hawk won.

"You are a lucky trio so far, senor," said Captain Guaymas with a smile.

"Their luck ends soon," came in a savage voice from Ramon Delporte, who overheard the words.

The two men again took position for the dread ordeal, more to be feared than the combat with swords.

As before, Ramon Delporte's face showed determination to kill.

Never having had aught to do, most of his leisure time had been passed in pistol practice and sword exercise, and he had never found his superior, so it had been deeply mortifying to him to be disarmed by the American officer.

His hope of revenge caused him to bear up and be able to smother his hate.

He had seen the quick look which had passed between his seconds, at his discomfiture, and he hoped to get even by killing his adversary.

Had he had a thought to the contrary, he would never have wished a second meeting, but, quick as a flash in firing, and deadly in his aim, he had no fear of the result.

Taking their stands, weapons in hands, the two again faced each other.

Now they were fifteen paces apart, yet each could see the other's eyes distinctly.

Willis Loring, as was his wont, was calm, his face pale yet unmoved.

Then came the words in the ringing voice of Night Hawk, who had explained what would be said and the conditions:

"Are you ready?"

"Ready!"

"Yes, senor."

"Forward—march—fire!"

There was but one pistol-shot, for before the man who held the other could draw trigger his arm fell to his side, the weapon dropped to the ground, for a bullet had cut through his shoulder.

"That is a reminder of me, Senor Delporte—something to remember," came in the deep, stern tones of Willis Loring.

There was no exultation in his tone or manner. He had not intended to kill the Mexican, and did not intend that he should kill him.

So he had fired with a quickness and deadly aim that won the admiration of Night Hawk and Broncho Bill, while the Mexicans were amazed.

There was none more so than was Ramon Delporte, and he hissed forth:

"Curse you! I'll—"

"Hold, Senor Delporte! Dare to utter insult to the man who has been so merciful to you, and I shoot you down in your tracks."

It was Captain Guaymas who spoke, and his face was livid with anger.

"What! do you insult me because I am crippled?" and Ramon Delporte turned upon him.

"No, for your wound is a slight one."

"But I regret that I have been your second, senor, in an affair where your foes have been gentlemen, and you have acted disgracefully."

"And I say the same," came from Fronteras.

"Senor, I am something of a surgeon, permit me to look to your wound, for it may be dangerous," and Night Hawk stepped to the side of the wounded Mexican.

Ramon Delporte was at heart a coward.

The wound pained him, and the thought that an artery might be cut and he thus bleed to death alarmed him, and so he gladly turned to the scout with:

"I thank you, senor; you are most kind."

"I am but humane, senor," was the reply of Night Hawk, who quickly stripped the clothing from the shoulder and examined the wound, while all stood near watching.

"My case, please, Will," said Night Hawk.

Going to his brother's horse, Broncho Bill took from the saddle-pouch a small leather case, in which were half a dozen surgical instruments, some lint, plaster and bandages.

The bullet was probed for, the Mexican standing the pain without a word, and in a moment after, with his forceps Night Hawk had secured the bullet, which had been checked by the bone.

He then quickly dressed the wound and said:

"Senor, you can readily ride home, and you had better place yourself in your doctor's care, for the wound is not dangerous if attended to."

"I thank you, senor."

"You are my friend," and the Mexican held forth his hand.

But Night Hawk said:

"Pardon me, senor, I have simply done my duty, and I never take the hand of a man in friendship, whom I am assured is a villain."

"Caramba!"

The oath burst from the lips of Senor Delporte as Night Hawk turned away, and his face became livid with rage.

"Senors, we have to thank you for your noble conduct in this affair."

"Adios," said Captain Guaymas, and raising their sombreros the two Mexicans turned to their horses, while Fronteras said, in a voice which the three Americans heard:

"Senor Delporte, as you are in no danger, we leave you in the hands of your servants."

"And permit me to add, Senor Ramon Delporte, that our paths through life separate here, for neither Senor Fronteras or myself hold as a friend a man whom we now feel convinced is not a gentleman."

With this the two seconds mounted their horses and galloped away, while the three Americans did the same, taking the trail to the river, and leaving Delporte and his peons in the motte.

Soon after Broncho Bill glanced back and said:

"There they go, and you bet he could bite a nail in two, so mad is Senor Ramon Delporte."

"I meant only to clip his shoulder but got nearer giving a fatal wound than I intended. But I hope he will be content as it is," said Lieutenant Loring, as they rode on toward the fort together.

"You have given him a lesson, lieutenant, he will not forget," said Broncho Bill, while Night Hawk added:

"And those Mexican gentlemen dropped him as soon as they suspected what he was."

"Yes, they are noble fellows, but, comrades, somehow I think that the Senor Delporte is a man we must look out for, as he is one to strike in the dark and at the back." Lieutenant Loring remarked, and in this opinion both Night Hawk and Broncho Bill fully agreed with the lieutenant and made up their minds to "look out for the Mexican."

CHAPTER XI.

RAMON DELPORTE'S PLOT.

TRUE to her pledge to sacrifice herself, Celina Velasquez became the bride of the old ranchero, Senor Delporte.

He had placed workmen upon his home and had it put in the best condition to welcome its new mistress, and he had gotten for her many valuable presents, hoping to win her love, for he had sense enough to feel that he was forcing her into a marriage with him by the threat that he had held over her father.

Ramon Delporte had tried to keep his affair with the American officer a secret, but somehow it leaked out; in fact, both Captain Guay-

mas and Senor Fronteras had spoken of it, not caring to let it remain unknown, and to the honor of Lieutenant Loring.

The young Mexican had not gone to his home, but to the hacienda of an intimate young friend, like himself a profligate, and who had run through with a fortune left him several years before.

Here fever had set in, and the Senor Delporte had visited his son, ordered his doctor to take every care of him, and there had his duty ceased.

But the young Mexican pulled through all right, and when he was pronounced out of danger, Senor Delporte had gone over to the Velasquez hacienda and claimed his beautiful bride.

White-faced, but calm, Celina Velasquez had gone through the ceremony, and then she had given into her father's hands the mortgages and ten thousand pesos handed over to her by her aged husband, remarking as she did so:

"Here, father, you are out of debt now, and I trust you and mother will be happy."

"As for myself, I never can, though I will be a faithful wife to the man whose name I bear."

To her elegant home went the young bride, and there, in the care of her household, she managed to drown her bitter thoughts; but her heart was across the Rio Grande.

Thrice again before her marriage with Senor Delporte, she had met Willis Loring, who had visited her; but not a word did she tell him of her pledge to marry the old ranchero, and he, at parting one night, had told her of his love and asked for her love in return.

She had not the heart then to tell him the truth, for it was so sweet to hear his words and confess her affection for him in return, and she so let it pass, intending to write him all.

Several days after she did write him, and sent the letter by a special messenger, and the next day she became the wife of the man to whom she had sold herself to save her parents from sorrow and want.

Day after day she hoped for a letter from Willis Loring, telling her that she was forgiven, and with such letter she felt that she could at least feel happier in her lot.

But no letter ever came to her, and in secret she nursed her bitter sorrow for a love that was lost.

Most kind to her indeed was Senor Delporte, and feeling that she did all in her power for his happiness, he one day made his will and left her every dollar of his large wealth, cutting off his son without a peso.

As for Ramon Delporte, he recovered from his wound and seemed to enter upon a different life.

He was not seen among his former intimates, and it was said that he had gone to work as manager of a hacienda some leagues distant from his father's home.

He had been cut by his former friends, Captain Guaymas and Senor Fronteras, to whom he owed large sums, for somehow they had come to believe that he had intended treachery against the Americans, and meant to have gotten them incriminated in the affair.

Time passed away after the marriage of Celina, and certainly her old husband was doing all in his power to make her happy.

Then came a sorrow to her in the death of her father, and soon after her mother followed him to the grave, and more wealth was added to that which she possessed, for she had been left her old home and its belongings.

Hardly had time in a measure healed her sorrow when another blow came upon her.

Her husband, since his marriage, had seemed to get a new lease on life.

When he visited his numerous ranches he had often gone alone instead, as had been his wont, being attended by his peon servants.

Returning one afternoon from a ranch some miles away from his hacienda, he had been riding quietly along when, from a thicket suddenly had whirled a lariat.

The noose had settled over the head of the old ranchero, and, as his startled horse had sprung forward, he had been dragged to the ground with a force that killed him.

Out from the thicket had sprung a tall form, the noose was taken from about the neck of the dead man, a hand was laid upon the pulse and the murderer said:

"He is dead."

Not a thing was touched about the body, and, destroying every trace of a track near it, the murderer went back into the thicket, while back to his fallen master strolled the faithful horse and in vain tried to rouse him.

Hours after the body was found by a ranchero, and it was taken to the hacienda, where it was met by the young wife.

Tears filled her eyes, and real sorrow she felt for the old man who had been so good to her.

But no one suspected that it was a case of murder, for the old ranchero had no enemies, and had he been killed by any one, something surely would have been missing from the body.

But his valuable diamonds, which he always wore, his elegant watch and chain, and a large sum in money he had that day received, were not disturbed.

So it was considered that he had fallen from his horse and been killed by his head striking a rock, upon which it rested when he was found.

Thus the secret of the fratricide was kept, for Ramon Delporte it was who had bribed his faithful peon, Andras, to commit the murder.

So the old ranchero was laid in his grave, and his young wife became mistress of all.

Ramon Delporte had been at the burial of his father, and it was upon his arm that the young widow had leaned, for who else had she to call upon, and the young man had seemed so deeply moved by his father's death.

Back to his new home had Ramon Delporte gone, and soon after Perez, the faithful servitor of Celina, and who, with his wife, had long dwelt upon the Delporte estate, came to her with word that a fatal accident had happened to the young master.

Celina soon heard the story of how it was. Ramon Delporte, while handling his firearms, had accidentally shot his faithful servant Andras, the peon.

Celina pitied the young ranchero, and wrote him a sympathetic note, in the goodness of her heart, little dreaming that the act had been a murder and not an accident.

When Ramon Delporte received that note, he at once made up his mind that Celina loved him, and that he would win her and her fortune all in good time, and he shaped his plans accordingly from that day to yet be master of the home from which he had been banished.

Whether he was successful or not the sequel will show.

CHAPTER XII.

A HAUNTED RUIN.

SEVERAL years have gone by, since the death of old Ranchero Delporte, and the scene of my story returns to Texas, where still stands the ruins of an old Mexican chapel and Mission built over a century ago.

It was located by the worthy padres who founded it, in a place that was considered the best for defense against all foes, and the walls were strongly built, seeming to be like a fort almost, rather than the resort of holy people.

The location chosen was a hill that rose like a sentinel in the midst of a seemingly boundless prairie.

The hill was a score of acres in size, very heavily timbered and rose to the height of some seventy feet above the prairie.

A swiftly flowing prairie stream split in twain against its northern sides and flowing around it made an island of the hill, as it were.

The banks were steep, and where the streams met there was a bar, where the water shallowed so as to form a ford.

Up among the heavy timber the chapel and Mission-house had been built, and there, after long years of safety, the inmates, padres and all, had all been massacred one night by the Comanche Indians, except a few of the unfortunate women and children who had been borne away into captivity.

From that awful night the place had been deserted. Mexican soldiers had buried the bodies of the dead, and ever afterward the fateful spot had been shunned.

Scores of years went by and the old ruin slowly crumbled under the touches of Time.

The trees grew about it closer and closer, as though to hide it from view, and a thicket sprung up in the little burying-ground of the old Mission.

Texas became a State of the Union, and yet the old ruin no one cared to visit.

Hunters, trappers, scouts, soldiers and even red-skins all gave it a wide berth.

By day casual travelers upon the prairie would sometimes water their horses at the stream and gaze upon the hill, yet they would not dare venture within its sacred shadows.

At last the rumor went abroad that a ghost had been seen there, and hunters and soldiers gave it more room in crossing the prairie, while guides, leading an emigrant, or Government train, would never pass even in view of it, if it could be avoided, as it had gone abroad that it was "bad luck" to do so.

Soldiers from the fort, brave as men can be, utterly refused to be led by their officers toward

the Haunted Mission, and thus the place was left to its utter solitude.

And yet two men had twice been within its very walls.

Once by day they had gone there and overlooked the ruin and the hill.

Another time they had passed the night there, and then gone on their way.

And yet to them no specters had appeared, no ghostly forms had disturbed their slumbers.

Those two men who scouted at ghosts were Night Hawk and Broncho Bill Powell.

Realizing that the old ruin would be a safe point from which to carry out certain plans they had in view, they had decided to go there and make their camp.

They had done so, and their advent by night had been greeted by a sight of a ghostly form, which had surprised them, for in their two former visits, some time before, they had seen nothing of the kind.

In this last visit the two scouts were not alone, for they were accompanied by a negro and an Indian, who will also figure in these pages.

The negro had come to Texas with his master, who had become a ranchero, and wounded by the Indians, he had been afterward slain, it was said, and his faithful colored friend and servant would have been hanged as his murderer by a party of lawless cowboys, but for the appearance upon the scene of Night Hawk and Broncho Bill, who had rescued him along with the Indian, who would also have been strung up with him.

The Indian had been a Comanche chief, who for some reason had left his people and gone to dwell among the settlements, and, taken by two Mexicans who belonged to a lawless band known as Cowboy Pirates of the Rio Grande, he would have been put to death had not Scraps, the negro, rescued him.

From that day the negro and Comanche Red Wolf had been inseparable, and owing their lives to the Buckskin Brothers, they at once became their allies, and a strong quartette they made, for four better shots, more daring men, wilder riders and better trailers were not to be found upon the border.

Scraps acted naturally as the servant of the Buckskin Brothers, cooking the meals, for he was a splendid cook, and Red Wolf looked after the horses, while Night Hawk and Broncho Bill were the leaders and planners of all movements.

But they were the friends also of the negro and Indian and well knew that they could depend upon them to the death.

The ghost which had set Scraps, brave as a lion at all other times, to flight across the prairie, had caused Broncho Bill and Night Hawk to give chase, and at the old ruin had been run to earth and captured.

Who the strange being was that haunted the old ruin the next chapter will reveal.

CHAPTER XIII.

A STRANGE MEETING.

ONE afternoon, some weeks after the Buckskin Brothers and their red and black allies had been camped in the ruined Mission, a party of horsemen were crossing the prairie.

Their way led toward the timber-covered hill which arose before them, and in whose shadows were the ruined chapel and Mission-house.

Some distance in advance, and leading the way apparently, was an Indian of majestic appearance and wearing the costume of a chief.

It was Red Wolf the Comanche, and he had been sent by Night Hawk to Fort Dreadnaught, a day's ride distant, to ask Major Willis Loring, the commandant, to send him a squad of cavalry for a secret expedition.

Riding at the head of the soldiers was the officer in command, and though several years have passed since the reader last beheld him upon the day of his duel on the Rio Grande with Ramon Delporte, his handsome face and soldierly form he will readily recognize.

The face has become sterner, and in the eyes a sadness hovers, which was not there then.

But the man is the same, and in the years that have passed he has won renewed fame, attained the rank of major, and been placed in command of the fort on the border that stood as a breastwork between the settlements and the cruel Comanches.

Some time before the major had passed near that old ruin, when returning from an Indian chase, and at night, and he had seen the story verified with his own eyes, that the Mission was haunted, for a white-robed form had stood in his pathway upon the prairie and then glided away toward the river to there disappear under the shadow of the timber-clad hill.

His men would not venture into those haunted shadows, and so the mystery had remained to him unsolved.

When therefore Night Hawk had sent for soldiers to aid him in a special work, the major had himself gone, anxious to solve the mystery, and he it was who now rode at the head of the score of cavalymen.

As they neared the river a horseman crossed the ford and joined them.

It was Night Hawk Powell, and the two talked earnestly together as they rode on toward the ruin.

Going across the river, and up into the timber on the hill, the party had halted. Red Wolf had shown the soldiers where to stake their horses, and Scraps was busy preparing a tempting supper, when Night Hawk pointed to the old chapel, a couple of hundred yards away and said:

"There is the place, Major Loring.

"Pass around that old tower to the door, sir."

"I thank you, Powell," was the low response of the major, and he walked slowly in the direction indicated by the scout.

His stern face was flushed and he seemed nervous as he moved on his way.

As he neared the river he paused, and then again advanced.

He seemed to walk as though approaching a round temple, and several times did he hesitate.

But plucking up determination to go on, he turned the corner of the tower and stood where he beheld the interior.

It was a small room, twelve feet square, and a heavy door hung upon massive hinges.

The door was open and there were two small windows in the tower, so that there was ample light to see the interior.

It was rudely finished, with a cot bed, table, chair and a few other things.

There was a guitar visible in one corner, a shelf of books, a swinging lamp, a few cooking utensils upon a hearth and a chest.

Then there was a rifle, a pair of revolvers, and bow and arrows on brackets in the wall. But the lower room held an occupant, too.

It was a woman!

She sat in the chair by the table, and her head was resting in her hands.

Her attitude was that of grief.

The form was willowy and graceful, and clad in a dress of white cloth, while masses of black hair fell upon her shoulders.

For a moment did the soldier stand and gaze upon her.

His face worked convulsively, and he seemed to be suffering mental agony.

At last he said, in a low, earnest voice:

"Celina!"

With a start the woman looked up.

But her eyes were filled with tears, and she was blinded by them.

"Holy mother! I thought I heard his voice call my name," she cried.

"You did, Celina.

"I am here."

She uttered a cry and sprung to her feet, and quickly the soldier stepped forward and confronted her.

"Come, Celina, for I know all.

"Come."

She sprung into his arms, and for a moment neither spoke.

At last she drew herself away, and looking up into his face, she said:

"You say that you know all, Senor Loring?"

"Yes, Celina."

"Let me tell you all, that you may know that I meant all that I told you when last we met—meant that I loved you devotedly as now I do; but sacrificed all to save my poor, misguided parents, who submitted to the sacrifice.

"Ah, senor, I have suffered, God only knows how much," and the beautiful woman, for she was still beautiful, told the story of her love for the soldier, and of her marriage to the old ranchero.

"I wrote you the truth and you never replied to my letter, senor, and so I believed that you had cast me utterly out of your heart."

"Ah, no, Celina, though I believed you false, and you lowered my confidence in women.

"But never did I get a letter from you."

"Ah me! I fear my father prevented its going."

"Had I received it, had I known that you were to be sacrificed for gold, as you tell me, I could and would have prevented it.

"I am rich, and I would have taken those mortgages, and thus saved you. But tell me now why I find you here, my poor Celina."

"It is a sad story, for I am here in hiding"

"From whom?"

"Ramon Delporte."

"And he?"

"I knew not where he was until that good scout, Senor Night Hawk, told me.

"He tried to force me to become his wife some months after the death of my husband, his father, and failing, he had me placed in a mad-house.

"It almost accomplished what he intended, and drove me mad to be there.

"But I escaped, and by the aid of my faithful peon servants, old Perez and his wife.

"I was broken down, unnerved, and fearing to be retaken, I crossed into Texas, and we came upon this spot.

"Here was a hiding-place, and Perez left me here with his wife while he returned to Mexico.

"Several times a year he came back, bringing us supplies.

"Then his wife died, and since then I have lived here alone.

"See, I am well and strong, and feeling that I was where Ramon Delporte could not find me, I was almost happy.

"Here those noble scouts found me, and a few days ago they went off for a trip to the Rio Grande.

"One of them returned, and he had a strange story to tell.

"He and his brother had been lying in ambush and had seen the chief of the Cowboy Pirates cross the river, and meet a Texan spy in a canyon.

"They could have killed them both, but instead, listened to all that passed between the two.

"They heard Ramon Delporte's plots for evil.

"They heard the spy tell of a plan to kidnap an American lady, or kill her, with Cowboy Pirates disguised as Indians, and for which red deed the chief was to receive a large sum.

"It seems that she is an actress, who once loved a young ranchero, the master of the negro, Scraps, and who was killed by the Indians.

"She sought to visit the grave of her lover, but was betrayed by those she employed in San Antonio to be her escort, and but for the Buckskin Brothers, she and her maid would have been kidnapped or slain; but they, hearing that she had gone on a two days' journey upon the prairie, followed her, fearing danger would befall her.

"The plot to kill the poor woman, who is to again visit San Antonio and make an effort to visit the grave of her lover, was overheard by the Buckskin Brothers and Broncho Bill went to the town to try and track down the guilty ones, while Senor Night Hawk came here and told me how the Cowboy Pirate chief had told his spy of me, and offered him a fortune if he would find me and put me to death."

"That chief of outlaws is none other than Ramon Delporte, Senor Loring, and it was to capture him and his band that Senor Night Hawk sent for your soldiers, but little did I dream that you would accompany them, and when he spoke of you being in command of the fort, what memories rushed upon me!"

"Ah, senor! do I meet you again in reality, you to whom I owe my life, or is it a dream?"

"No, Celina, it is no dream, I pledge you, but the sober reality, and, meeting you again as I do now, I will vow that this time no one shall come between our loves—no one shall divide our lives!"

"Heaven grant it!" was her low reply.

Thus, after long years of sorrow, Celina Delporte and Willis Loring had met again, and the love that had sprung up in the hearts of each that day of meeting in the Rio Grande, had but grown stronger as time went by, for, try as he might, believe her false as he had, the soldier could not forget the beautiful Mexican maiden or shut her image out of his life.

CHAPTER XIV.

MISSING LINKS.

WHILE Night Hawk had returned to the ruin, after he and Broncho Bill had gone on their recent expedition to the Rio Grande, his brother had gone to San Antonio, the parting having been occasioned by their overhearing the plots of Captain San Cruz, as Ramon Delporte was known to his men, and his spy, Tiger Tom, a Texan desperado.

The cause of the Buckskin Brothers having taken up their quarters at the ruined Mission, was on account of the recent marauding expeditions of the Cowboy Pirates.

They had formed the idea that the outlaw band and the Comanches were allies, and they

were anxious to discover if this really was the case.

To do so they sought a camp where they could watch both Indians and outlaws, and at the same time have a retreat to seek in case of great peril to themselves.

They had told Major Loring that they believed the outlaws got their information of the movements of Government and emigrant trains, and when the settlements were left most unguarded, by spies who dwelt upon the ranches.

To find these spies out was the work the Buckskin Pards had set for themselves.

While watching upon the Rio Grande, they had thus seen Ramon Delporte, as Captain San Cruz, meet in a canyon, a regular rendezvous, Tiger Tom, a Texan desperado whom they well knew, yet had not before suspected of being an ally of the lawless river band.

The plots they had heard between the two villains, sent Night Hawk back to the camp in the ruin, and Broncho Bill to the farm to discover all that he could of who was the one that sought the life of the actress, and was willing to pay so liberally to have her put out of the way.

Broncho Bill had proven himself a thorough detective, for he had found out that the man who wished to have Mademoiselle Cleopatra, the beautiful actress, killed, was her husband.

He already knew her unfortunate story, of how she had married an adventurer, her father a supposed millionaire, but in reality a bankrupt, believing the man to be rich and wishing to extricate himself from financial difficulties by getting a wealthy son-in-law.

The death of the old merchant had brought out the truth, and the poor girl who had obeyed her father's command, when her love belonged to another, was cruelly treated by her husband when he found she was poor.

She had left him, taken another name and gone upon the stage, to at once win position as an actress and singer of rare beauty and talent.

Dogging her steps again, when he found her able to coin gold with her voice, the husband had tried to force her again to live with him, when she threatened him with the gallows, accusing him of having put her father to death.

In terror the man had fled from her.

But soon after he had begun again to dog her steps, and supplied with money in some mysterious way, he was hunting her to her death.

He had planned to have her killed upon her first trip on the prairies, when she sought to visit the grave of the man she had been forced to break with to marry the adventurer; but the Buckskin Brothers had rescued her.

Still persistent in her determination to go to Ranchero's Rest, the old home of her lover, and where the faithful Scraps had buried him, the scouts had promised her to take her there at a time when there was less danger from Cowboy Pirates and Comanches.

It was on his visit to San Antonio to slay Tiger Tom the outlaw spy, that Broncho Bill had discovered the plotting husband.

He had also received a letter from the actress that she would soon be in town, to start upon the pilgrimage to the grave of Henry Harcourt, the man whom she had idolized rather than loved.

Forming a plan in his own mind, of how to act, Broncho Bill had taken the landlord of the hotel into his confidence, and told him what he wished said to Mademoiselle Cleopatra upon her arrival, and also a report which he desired spread around town.

This last was to the effect that the actress and her maid would start upon a certain day for Ranchero's Rest, and her escort would be only the Buckskin Brothers, Scraps and Red Wolf.

Having laid his plans to his own satisfaction, Broncho Bill set out for the ruined Mission, to meet his brother and arrived there after the coming of Major Loring and his troopers.

Then a council of war was held, and old Perez the peon having arrived with his regular supply for the beautiful woman who had hidden there from the vengeance of Ramon Delporte, who the reader now knows has turned outlaw, the party set off for the Rio Grande, leaving Celina with her faithful old servant to await their return.

Under the skillful guidance of the Buckskin Scouts, the major and his troopers reached the Rio Grande in safety and unseen either by redskin or Cowboy Pirates, and the whole party went into camp in a secluded canyon.

Then Night Hawk and Broncho Bill set to work to spring the trap they had set to catch the daring and red-handed Delporte, who sought to get his step-mother out of the way as he would then be heir to the vast fortune left by his father.

CHAPTER XV.

THE RENDEZVOUS.

THE day after the arrival of the scouts and the soldiers, at their hiding-place among the canyons of the Rio Grande, a horseman was riding across the prairie not many miles from the retreat of the troopers, and his trail led toward the river.

The man rode a large, well-built horse, which seemed little fatigued by a long jaunt and kept up a steady gait.

The rider was a man of powerful build, with broad shoulders and massive limbs, and he was armed with a rifle and belt of revolvers.

His attire was that of a Texan cowboy, with broad sombrero and the heavy leather leggings.

His face was one that showed devilry in every feature, and he looked a desperado throughout.

And desperado he was, for it was Tiger Tom the spy of the Cowboy Pirates of the Rio Grande.

He had a head full of news, and he was going to keep his usual Sabbath Day appointment with the outlaw chief.

The meeting-place was in a narrow, deep canyon on the American bank of the river, and near a ford that only the outlaw chief and Tiger Tom knew the existence of.

To keep this a secret, the chief was wont always to go alone to meet the spy, and he also was glad of this, as he cared not to be seen by several of the band who might betray him, as they were his foes.

Upon reaching the wilder country near the river, Tiger Tom slackened his pace and soon after came to the canyon where he was soon to meet his chief.

"Ahead this time," he muttered, as he threw himself from his saddle.

But he had not long to wait, as soon there were hoof-falls heard, and Captain San Cruz rode into sight.

He had changed much in the years that had passed since Major Loring had worsted him in the duel.

His hair was worn long, falling half-way down his back, his beard, black as ink, reached to his belt and his form had filled up.

No one would recognize him as the slender, beardless young Mexican of five years before.

And just that was what he intended, for, unable longer to dwell near his old home, on account of his debts, he had started for the United States, he gave out, but, captured by the outlaws of the Rio Grande frontier, he had cast his lot with them and become their chief.

Could he find Celina Delporte, and let it be proven that she was dead, as heir, he could get his father's riches and no one knowing him as the outlaw, he could return and revel in the luxuries which his wealth would give him, and those who had frowned him down would fawn upon him.

Such was the goal for which he was striving.

He was dressed elegantly, his saddle and trappings were bespangled with gold and silver, and his revolvers were superbly finished weapons.

As he rode into the canyon and beheld his spy, his dark, evil face brightened, and he called out:

"Ho, Tiger Tom, I am glad you are here."

"I'm allers on hand, cap'n, when thar is dust ter win," was the answer.

"Well, what have you done?" and the outlaw chief threw himself from his saddle and sat down on a rock near the desperado.

"I'll tell yer, cap'n, just what has been did, and I guesses yer'll be pleased."

"You are always faithful, Tom, and I can rely upon you."

"But have you found the woman?"

"Which one?"

"The one I seek to find by all means—Celina Delporte."

"No, cap'n, I hasn't found her, but I has a clew."

"Well?"

"I may be wrong."

"And you may be right."

"Just so."

"Well, out with your clew."

"You hain't much skeer about yer, has yer?"

"I do not fear man nor devil."

"How about ghosts?"

"Curses! there are no such things."

"I tries ter believe ther same, but sometimes thinks different."

"Is the woman dead that you speak so?" eagerly asked the chief.

"Not as I knows on."

"What in Satan's name do you mean then?"

"Does yer know that old Mexican Mission over here in Texas."

"The one that is a ruin?"

"Yas, whar thar massacree tuk place nigh onter a hundred years ago."

"I know it, but have never been there."

"Few persons has."

"What about it?"

"They say its haunted."

"So I've heard superstitious fools say."

"It's a female ghost they says."

"Yes."

"It's a woman in white."

"How do you know?"

"Waal, cap'n, I tell yer that I has seen hunters as had been nigh that old ruin, and they tells me of it."

"What has that got to do with the woman I seek?"

"Just this, pard, thet ther one you are a-wantin' ter find, crossed ther river at ther time yer lost her, with a old peon man and woman."

"Ther old peon were seen ter go back ag'in, and he makes regular trips across and back several times a year, I has heard."

"When he comes over ter Texas he has a load on a pack-horse."

"When he goes back ag'in, ther pack are empty."

"Go on," said the chief, in a low, earnest tone.

"Waal, Cap, thet old peon do take ther same trail each time, and it do lead out to whar thet old Mission is."

"So why might not thet gal yer seeks ter find be ther ghost that haunts thet ruin?"

The chief was upon his feet in an instant, and he hissed forth:

"Caramba! but you may be right, Tiger Tom."

"She was aided to escape from the mad-house by two leons, and it looks plausible, for her fear of me would make her hide away."

"I will go there, and if it is Celina Velasquez, then you are a rich man, Tiger Tom, ay, and I am worth a million."

"I will be off at once," and in his excitement Ramon Delporte started to mount his horse.

But the strong arm of Tiger Tom was upon him, and then came the words:

"Hold on, cap'n, for thar is other work ter be did, and thar is time fer all."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PLOTTERS.

At the words of Tiger Tom, Ramon Delporte seemed to regain his wonted nerve, for he said, quickly:

"You are right, Tom, I was too fast."

"But the news you give me almost unmans me after long years of hoping, waiting, planning, plotting and mining to gain the fortune that I have vowed shall yet be mine."

"I will go to the old Mission, and I feel in my heart that I will find that woman there."

"Will you go alone, Pard Cap'n?"

"Yes, Tom, for I care to trust no man with my secret."

"You will have a long ride."

"True."

"And it are dangersome."

"I will risk all dangers."

"Yer better take yer best horse, all yer weepens yer kin handle, and food ter last yer."

"You are right, and I will go well prepared."

"When will yer start?"

"Just as soon as I can return across the river to my stronghold and get another horse and fit-out for the trip."

"Well, I wishes yer luck, cap'n, and I'll hold yer to yer promise, ef it's ther gal."

"I will not forget you, Tom."

"But what else have you to tell me?"

"You remember the t'other gal?"

"That actress?"

"Yes, cap'n."

"Well, what of her?"

"She was ter be done fer, too."

"I remember that I told you to make known my terms to the man who wanted to get rid of her."

"I did."

"With what result?"

"He'll pay it."

"If I get my fortune that sum would not be worth worrying for; but in case the ghost of that old ruin may not be the woman I seek, I'll undertake the work."

"It's a snug little sum, cap'n."

"What is your plan, Tiger Tom?"

"Well, cap'n, it are agreed thet ther gal shall be ketched on ther way."

"Send some one with her that we can trust."

"Can't do it."

"And why?"

"Because ther Powell Pards, with ther nigger and ther Injun, is ter see her through."

"Whew!"

"Yas, pard."

"It will be a big thing to kill the entire outfit, for with these Powells and their red and black pards out of the way, we can have things far more our own way on the Rio Grande, if I have to still keep up this life of outlawry."

"It's a fact, cap'n."

"They will have to be surprised, though."

"Sure, for they are four terrors."

"And it is no easy thing to surprise that quartette."

"No, cap'n, but I guess we kin work 'em, ef they is catched on ther open prararer by night, where the men kin circle round and pour in a fire on 'em."

"I will have to send a dozen men."

"Got any more to spare?"

"Why?"

"You'll need 'em."

"I will send Juan, my lieutenant, with fourteen men."

"You'll need 'em all; but won't you go?"

"No, for I go to that old mansion."

"So yer does."

"Well, when do you want the men?"

"I wants 'em sent right off to ther Secret Canyon, and they kin wait thar until they gits word from me, or I goes myself."

"They will be all ready for the move, and I'll tell 'em jist when ther party is ter start, and then watch which trail they takes, and, with a good horse I kin git ahead of 'em and post yer lieutenant."

"Those four men and the woman will be all there are of the party?"

"Ther leddy has a female comrade they calls her maid."

"All right, I will have the work done."

"Now I will go and get ready for my trip to the Mission, and order Juan to start with his men for the Secret Canyon to-night."

"I'll expect you here next Sunday, Tiger Tom, with the money for the work done."

"I'll be here, cap'n, and have ther dust too; for thet man are a good one."

"The one, you mean, who wishes to get rid of the woman?"

"Yes, cap'n."

"What is his name?"

"He calls himself Kent, but I reckon he is flyin' under false colors."

"All right, see that he pays you, and now you had better start back, but when we meet again I hope to tell you that I have gotten the fortune which that accursed woman cheated me out of by marrying my father."

"Ah! but my revenge will be sweet upon her, and with vast wealth I will make Fronteras and Captain Guaymas regret that they ever turned their backs upon me."

"I tell you, Tiger Tom, money is power," and with a bitter laugh the robber chief sprang into his saddle and rode back toward the river while Tiger Tom mounted and returned the way he had come.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE COWBOY PIRATES' STRONGHOLD.

THE stronghold of "Captain San Cruz," as Ramon Delporte called himself while chief of the Cowboy Pirates of the Rio Grande, was not very far from the river on the Mexican shore.

It was situated in the midst of a most rugged country, and the approaches were through narrow canyons which could be defended by half a dozen men against a hundred.

After crossing the river the robber chief continued on his way for a mile, when he turned in among the hills.

Penetrating a canyon, which seemed but a deep fissure in the earth, he rode for half a mile when he dismounted and led his horse up a steep ascent, which was little more than natural stairs, formed by water dashing down the narrow chasm, when the streams in the hilltops would overflow.

At the top of this pass stood a man, rifle in hand.

It was one of the two sentinels always kept on duty at the stronghold.

Further in, right amid the wildest scenery, was a valley, and here lay the camp of the Cowboy Pirates.

There were a number of rudely-built adobe huts, and they faced a stream which could not be readily crossed.

It was deep, only thirty feet in width, but a foaming torrent dashing among ragged rocks.

The water surged along with terrific force,

and a horse or man entering the stream would have been dashed to death at once.

On the banks of the stream upon the other shore, grew several large trees, and between them, with ropes and pulleys, had been erected a bridge.

It was some thirty-five feet long, a yard wide, had a railing on either side, and was strongly built.

The end between the trees was made fast, and it could be lowered by two men, so as to span the stream.

The chief gave a shrill whistle as he drew near, and several men at once came down from the huts a couple of hundred yards away, and which were situated under the base of a lofty hill.

The stream formed a horseshoe-like curve, in front of the tents, running out from the bottom of the hill, and then back to it again, so that no one could approach the stronghold by that way, unless over the bridge.

Behind the tents there was a steep path leading up to the ridge, and thereon was a sentinel stationed.

But, so wild was the country in that direction that a few brave men could dispute the passage of a small army.

The grazing-grounds of the Cowboy Pirates was a mile away in the valleys, and here the stock of the outlaws were kept, for with their spies they could ever gain timely information of attack, and to hem them in it would take a large force to advance by the ridge and the canyons at the same time.

It was of course known that their stronghold was in that range, but all efforts to dislodge them thus far had been utterly useless.

When the bridge was carried the chief rode across and at once went to one of the huts.

Here he called to a peon and gave him certain orders about his weapons and getting his best horse saddled for him, at the same time telling him to prepare a haversack of provisions for him, enough to last a week.

Then he called for his lieutenant, and a young man entered the hut.

His appearance indicated that he was an American, but he spoke Spanish perfectly, and his face was that of a man who was wholly lost, body and soul.

"Senor Juan, how many men are in camp?" asked Ramon Delporte.

"Twenty-three, senor, besides you, Tomas and myself."

"And with the herd?"

"Seven, senor."

"You count the two sentinels?"

"No, sir; I only counted the twenty-three ready for duty."

"These, with the two sentinels and the seven herders, make thirty-two?"

"Yes, senor."

"I wish you to take fourteen picked men, mind you, men you can depend upon, and go into Texas."

"Yes, senor."

"You know the Secret Canyon?"

"Yes, senor."

"Go there, starting to-night, and covering up your trail as you go."

"I will, senor."

"You must take your very best horses, all of you go doubly armed, and remain at the Secret Canyon until a messenger arrives to tell you that a small party have left San Antonio and are moving on their way to the ranch known as the Rancho's Rest, which some of our men burned some time ago."

"Yes, senor."

"You are to go in the disguise of Indians, by the way, or at least carry such disguises with you."

"I understand, chief."

"When you know where you are to find the party, you are to attack them, either upon the open prairie or in camp."

"I will, senor."

"You must fire on them, showing no mercy, and keep up your fire until the last one is killed."

"Have no mercy on them, senor?"

"There will be six, I think, and they will doubtless give you a pretty severe fight."

"We will be fifteen to six, senor."

"I know that, and you will need to be, for four of these men are the Buckskin Brothers and their two companions, the negro and the Comanche."

"Ah!"

"Do you hesitate, Juan?"

"No, senor, not with fifteen of us; but we will need to be that many, as you say."

"Take with you Nick Rawlings, Sim Lucas and Giant Saul, those cowboys whom the Pow-

ells drove out of Texas, and who will be glad to pay them back."

"Yes, senor, there are a number who remember the Powells, and will be glad to even up with them, for the Buckskin Pardes have been very hard on our people from the first."

"Well, you can square up past debts against them now."

"And the other two, chief?"

"Are women."

"It's bad luck to kill a woman, Captain San Cruz."

"If you don't wish to do the work, say so, Senor Juan, and I will have Senor Tomas go."

"I always obey orders, chief, and I will go; but I would rather kill a dozen men than one woman."

"Bah! it's but fancy, for life is the same in man or woman."

"I will go, senor."

"Then start to-night, and as you know who you have to fight, you will be sure to pick your men."

"You will seize all that the party have of value and bring it to me, while you must scalp them, to have it appear like Indians' work, and leave the bodies there."

"I understand, senor," and Juan departed from the hut, and half an hour after, Ramon Delporte rode away from the stronghold on his way to the old Mission.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LYING IN WAIT.

PERCHED among the crevices of the rocks, out of which grew scrub-trees that completely hid them from view, were three men who had heard every word of the conversation between Ramon Delporte, the outlaw chief, and Tiger Tom, his Texan spy.

The three men were Night Hawk, Broncho Bill and Major Loring.

The Buckskin Scouts had remembered, after their former experience in the canyon, the hour and day that the outlaw leader met his spy, and knew the exact spot where that meeting took place.

So they had asked the major to accompany them, and the three had left the little hidden camp half a mile away, and ensconced themselves in favorable positions for the hearing and seeing of all that took place in the canyon.

The major was astounded, and it was hard for him to keep from firing upon the two villains; but he knew that the Buckskin Brothers were doing the detective work that would bring all out right in the end, and so he curbed the desire.

What the three heard the reader already knows.

When Tiger Tom had started upon his way back to the town, and Ramon Delporte had left the canyon to return to his stronghold, the three left their hiding-places and met up among the timber on the ridge.

"Well, major?" said Night Hawk with a smile.

"It was Ramon Delporte, my old foe, there is no doubt of that, though his long beard and hair disguise him wonderfully."

"Ah, yes, it was the Mexican who tried so hard to kill you in the duel," Broncho Bill remarked.

"Well, since then I have a grudge against him that will make me less merciful, for he it was who put good Senora Delporte in the mad-house, and has made her keep in hiding from fear of him," and the face of the major darkened at the remembrance.

"Well, major, we are all prepared now to circumvent the rascals," Night Hawk said.

"I don't exactly see through your plan, and I am sorry that we allowed the villains to depart."

"They but get themselves deeper into the net, major, for Delporte will soon be back, on his way to the Haunted Mission, and then will be our time to capture him."

"Ah!"

"When we have done that, we will start off on our way to San Antonio, and, if I am not mistaken, we will be able to strike a telling blow against the Cowboy Pirates."

"You are doing your work well, Powell, you and Broncho Bill, and I have every confidence that you will carry it out successfully."

"But I fear that Delporte may not return this way, in going to the old Mission, and should he escape us the fate of poor Senora Delporte is sealed."

"He will be sure to come through this canyon, Major Loring, for he does not wish to cross at the regular ford below, where he may be

seen and known, and this way he will save some dozen miles," Night Hawk said.

"But, for fear he may not, I will go to camp, and send Scraps to one ford and Red Wolf to another, so as to let us know," and so saying, Broncho Bill hastened away, for he saw that the threat of Ramon Delporte had made the major very uneasy about Senora Delporte.

In a short while Broncho Bill returned and said:

"They have gone, major, and now he cannot slip by us without our knowing it."

"But, with George, I believe he is sure to come this way, and we had better get into positions to stop him."

"How will you do it?"

"We could kill him, major, but I think a lariat is safer," returned Night Hawk.

"It might fail."

"Not if Will throws it, and I will follow suit with my lariat upon his horse the moment that Will's noose is over him."

"Now let us take our places."

This they did, and Night Hawk and Broncho Bill selected hiding-places that were advantageous to throwing their lassoes, one end of which they made fast to the small trees near them.

"All ready now, major," called out Night Hawk, and then a silence followed while the trio were awaiting the coming of their prey.

CHAPTER XIX.

THROWING THE LASSO.

THE party crouching among the rocks above the canyon, had not very long to wait, after they had gotten ready for the work in hand, before they heard the clatter of hoofs.

"He is coming," whispered the major.

The two scouts made no reply, but nerved themselves for what they had to do.

In a short while a horseman came in sight around the bend of the canyon.

He was coming from the river, and though mounted upon another horse he was at once recognized as Ramon Delporte.

He rode along at a quick walk, allowing his horse to take his own gait, and he seemed lost in meditation.

Nearer and nearer he came, and suddenly a dark cloud appeared above his head, and as it lengthened out it was revealed as a whirling lasso.

The horse saw it, and gave a spring.

But too late, for the coil was about the body of the outlaw, pinning his arms to his side, and the spring of his horse dragged him from the saddle.

At the same instant Night Hawk threw his lariat, and catching the flying horse he brought him down with a heavy fall.

"Hold him under your revolver, major, while I go down," cried Broncho Bill.

"Move and you die!" cried the major from the cliff, leveling his revolver upon the fallen man, who was struggling violently.

Running to the aid of his brother, now that the horse had quietly risen and submitted to his fate, Night Hawk seized the lariat he held and kept it taut, while Broncho Bill slid down another, already made fast to a small tree, and in an instant stood over the fallen chief.

The outlaw had had a heavy fall, and the lariat drawn tight still pinioned his hands to his side.

He was considerably shaken up by his fall, and more so to feel that he was powerless to resist.

"How are you, Senor Ramon Delporte, alias Captain San Cruz, chief of the Cowboy Pirates of the Rio Grande?" coolly said Broncho Bill, as he quickly took the arms of the outlaw from his belt.

"It is a lie! I am not Ramon Delporte!" cried the chief.

"Who are you then?"

"Senor Pedro Sanchez, a Mexican ranchero, and you shall rue this work."

"Senor, you need not lie to me, for I know you as you are, and there are others who will recognize you, and they are not far away."

"Pardon me if I make you a prisoner, but you deserve it as a red-handed villain."

As Broncho Bill spoke he quickly bound the man, who only once tried to resist, and then found that the man in whose power he was had muscles of iron, so quickly was he subdued.

"Now, George, you and the major can draw him up, and I will bring the horse around."

As he spoke, he took the lariat that held the horse and also tied it to the prisoner, at the same time steadying him, as those on the top of the canyon began to draw him slowly upward.

The face of the chief was as pallid as death.

He recognized Broncho Bill, and knew from

his words that Night Hawk was on the cliff above.

His having said also "major," led him to suppose that Major Loring, his old foe, whom he knew to be in command of Fort Dreadnaught, was one of his captors.

In his agony of spirit he groaned aloud, for, by one fell swoop, he had fallen from hope to despair.

He had crossed into Texas, disguised as a ranchero, and expected fully to find Celina in the old ruined Mission.

She was the one bar that stood between him and the vast wealth left by his father.

With Celina dead, and her death proven, he could claim his own, and he was laying his plans to have her killed by pretended Indians, so that not a shadow of suspicion should fall upon him.

He saw ahead what he had long struggled for, when he crossed the Rio Grande, and how all hope was gone from him, for he was in the hands of the Buckskin Brothers, who had been his deadly foes, and upon whose heads he had set a price.

Having seen the prisoner dragged over the edge of the canyon, Broncho Bill mounted the splendid animal he had ridden, and started around to join his comrades.

He went toward the prairie, and after a ride of a couple of miles came upon the little camp hidden away among the canyons.

Night Hawk and the prisoner had arrived, and the soldiers were gathered about them, Scraps and Red Wolf having also returned, for they had seen the chief cross the river, so knew there was no need for them to go to the other fords.

As Broncho Bill rode up and dismounted, Ramon Delporte glared at him with the ferocity of a tiger, while he hissed forth:

"This is your work."

"Oh, no, we all had a hand in it, and we are to be congratulated," and Broncho Bill passed on, followed by the major and Night Hawk, for the fate of the prisoner was to be settled then and there.

CHAPTER XX.

JUSTICE.

"WELL, Broncho, as you said, we are to be congratulated upon our success, and yet you and Night Hawk have done it all," said Major Loring, when he had walked apart with the Buckskin Brothers, and upon his face settled a look of joy, at the thought that Celina Delporte was no longer in danger, mingling with an expression of pain at the duty before him.

"Well, major, we have him, and he is a man who should have no mercy, for he has been merciless alike to man and woman, and many a grave has he made, with the aid of his cut-throat band," and Night Hawk spoke more sternly than was his wont, for the heart of the scout was as tender as a child's.

"He deserves death a hundred-fold," Major Loring rejoined.

"Yes, a thousand-fold," added Broncho Bill.

"You think it would be best to take him to the fort?" asked the major wishing to sound the scouts as to their views.

Both were silent a moment, and then Night Hawk remarked:

"Major Loring, if this man was a fugitive from justice, guilty of a crime, it would be well to try him."

"But we all know who he is, and we heard his plot and plans in the canyon to-day, and Will and I know what he said before."

"He was plotting to kill the Senora Delporte, and his spy, Tiger Tom, has gone off with orders for the death of mademoiselle, her maid, Will, myself and our faithful pards, Scraps and Red Wolf."

"The men of his band are to waylay us, as you know, and no mercy is to be shown."

"Ranches have been robbed and burned, cattle run off and lives taken by that man, Ramon Delporte."

"He plotted to destroy us at the time of your duel with him, and as Will found out, when he went into Mexico on his track, he is believed to have killed his father."

"Now I say lose no time with this man, for we must be on the move," and Night Hawk spoke warmly.

"And a prisoner would hamper us," added Broncho Bill.

"He hangs," was the quiet response of Major Loring.

Then he added:

"I know what the man is, and he richly deserves death."

"I will take all responsibility and order his execution within the hour."

This settled the fate of Ramon Delporte, and advancing with the two scouts, to where the prisoner stood, bound hand and foot, Major Loring said in a deep, earnest voice:

"Ramon Delporte, I am here to tell you that you are doomed to death."

"You have but one hour to live."

"It is not law! I demand a trial," shouted the prisoner.

"It may not be law, according to civilized courts, but it is justice according to your crimes, and I shall have you executed within the hour."

"Sergeant Hazel, select a place of execution and prepare all that is necessary," and the major turned to his sergeant, who saluted and started off to obey the order given him.

"I tell you, I demand a trial, as a Mexican," yelled Ramon Delporte.

"You shall have no trial, senor, for my word is law upon this frontier, when I have to deal with such as you."

"My orders are to execute all murderous raiders crossing the Rio Grande to destroy American homes and kill our people."

"For years you have done that which you deserve death for, and demands and entreaties to me are in vain, for you have but an hour to live, so make your peace with Heaven, if one so vile can get forgiveness."

"You kill me because you think I took Celina Velasquez from you."

"Oh, no, for I know that the Senorita Velasquez, became the wife of your father, whom you killed."

It was a random shot, but it struck home, and a shriek broke from the lips of the doomed man, while he said with quivering voice:

"I did not kill him!"

"Who says that I killed him?"

"I will not argue with a dying man, Senor Delporte."

"But I wish to say that you were right in your surmise, that the white-robed form often seen at the old Mexican Mission, is the Senora Delporte, and she has hidden there like a hunted deer, from you."

"And you know this?"

"You will be happy with her while I lie in my grave?"

The man fairly foamed at the mouth, and turning upon his heel Major Loring walked sadly away, for he was a man who felt keenly the duty he had to perform; but he was not one to shirk it.

Sergeant Hazel soon found a suitable tree for the hanging, and a rope was thrown over a limb and a grave was dug beneath.

Major Loring gazed at the preparations an instant and then sent a soldier for the Buckskin Brothers.

They soon arrived, and he said:

"I could never tolerate execution by hanging, though I know it is the law of our land to send the days of murderers."

"To me it is brutal, and, as death is the punishment that Ramon Delporte shall suffer, I will order him shot."

"I agree with you, major, as to the brutality of hanging a man," Night Hawk said, while Broncho Bill added:

"And I also, Major Loring."

Sergeant, order eight men as executioners, with carbines, and let but four of the guns be loaded with ball," was the command of the major, and walking up to the prisoner, he said:

"Senor Delporte, I have changed your form of execution, and will have you shot, dangerous as the rattle of firearms may be if heard here."

"It's death, be it by rope or bullet," growled the Mexican.

Making no response to this Major Loring said:

"I would ask if there are any wishes you have, which you desire attended to, for, upon my honor as a soldier, I will obey your last requests?"

"You promise this?" eagerly asked the prisoner.

"I have said so."

"Have you pen and ink and paper?"

"Yes, the sergeant has both."

The articles were sent for and the doomed man quickly wrote a letter, and drawing a handsome ring from his finger placed it in the envelope.

"Will you ask your Buckskin Scouts to accompany me to the top of the canyon, when I can show them where to put this?"

"I know, for I saw you put your hand in the crevice on your arrival, as though to feel for a letter, and Tiger Tom did the same," said Night Hawk.

"And, Major Loring, will you have this placed there and pledge me that no one shall disturb it?"

"In fact those two men alone could do so," and he glanced at the Buckskin Scouts.

"I can do nothing else than promise you; and as for these gentlemen, you misunderstand them if you think they would be guilty of so mean an act as to take it."

"After two weeks, if it is there, they can, for I care not; but I will say that I would trust their word as I would yours, Major Loring, for they have been my open foes as you have."

"And, senor," and the voice of the Mexican quivered, while his face assumed a look of intense sadness.

"Senor, I have been a very wicked man, and now I confess it."

"I sought to sacrifice you, your friends, and Fronteras and Guaymas, whom I owed large sums of money to, the day of my duel with you, for those nine men, and my peons, were my hired assassins."

"I killed the peon, Andras, because I feared that he would betray me, for I had hired him to kill my father."

"I was a merciless foe to poor Senora Celina, and I have plotted other crimes."

"I confess this, because you give this letter to him to whom it is addressed, or leave it rather where he will get it, and also because you, in your mercy, have me shot and not hanged."

"I fear to die, I cannot repent, I am in despair and still I am revengeful."

"Come, I am ready to die, if die I must, so end my misery at once."

"I will do so, for it is more humane," said the officer, and his voice rung out sternly giving the orders for the immediate execution of the prisoner.

The bonds were taken from his feet, and between two soldiers he marched to the head of the grave dug for him.

Then before him halted the execution squad, ten paces away.

Not an atom of color was in the doomed man's face, his lips were set, his eyes downcast.

He seemed like a statue, so motionless did he stand.

His hands were bound behind him, and his form was erect, while he gazed straight down into the grave at his feet.

A moment of awful silence, and then came the deep-voiced commands from the lips of Major Loring:

"Attention, platoon!"

"Ready!"

"Aim!"

"Fire!"

The eight carbines flashed as one, and Ramon Delporte sunk dead in his tracks, the victim of military justice.

"Bury him, men, and then prepare for the march," and then turning to Broncho Bill he handed him the sealed package given him by the robber of the Rio Grande, and said:

"Will you kindly place this where he wished it left, Powell?"

"Yes, sir," and Broncho Bill walked away on his errand.

When he returned the troopers were ready for the march, and with the Buckskin Brothers acting as guides, they moved off on a secret mission, all saddened by the scene which they had been actors in, even though it had been the execution of Ramon Delporte, the Robber of the Rio Grande.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE ACTRESS.

In a large room, of a hotel in San Antonio, sat two persons.

One was a woman whose beauty of face and grace of form would arrest attention anywhere.

She was young, scarcely over twenty-two, and yet her face wore an expression of sadness, called there by scenes which had sent a shadow over her young life.

The other occupant of the room was a pretty girl of eighteen, whose piquant face and manner showed her to be French.

The two were she who was known as Mademoiselle Cleopatra, and her maid, Lizette, and who were also friends as well as holding the relationship of mistress and maid.

Mademoiselle Cleopatra's life had been a strange one.

She had, as has been told already, supposed herself to be the heiress of great wealth, for she was the only child of an Eastern merchant.

She had lost her heart to a young soldier, and they were engaged, when an adventurer, Keene Kendall had crossed her path, and saved the life

of her father and herself, when their horses were running away with them.

Elegant in manner, intelligent and supposed to be rich, Keene Kendall had made a bold play for the hand of the young girl, and her father, on his last legs financially, had almost forced her to break with her lover and marry the adventurer.

Soon after had followed the sudden death of the merchant, and the secret that he left his daughter penniless.

Duped, the adventurer turned brute and his young wife fled from him, and going upon the stage won fame and was winning fortune when he again sought her out.

But she defied him, threatened to have him arrested as her father's murderer, and they parted.

But he dogged her steps and, when she went with her company to San Antonio, and giving them a week of rest, sought to visit the grave of the man she had loved, and who, resigning from the army had gone to Texas and turned ranchero, to there lose his life, Keene Kendall, under the name of Kent had followed her there, and hired assassins to end her life.

Through the pluck of the Buckskin Brothers she had escaped, and continued on with her company.

But she would not give up that pilgrimage to Ranchero's Rest, where was her lover's grave.

She felt that she owed it to his memory, to herself to go there, and she meant to erect over his remains a tomb.

She wished to impress the spot and its surroundings indelibly in her memory, and, an artist, she was determined to sketch the grave and the scene as it was, and place it on canvas, to have ever before her.

So was it that she had returned again to San Antonio, and she was waiting at the hotel for the coming of the Buckskin Brothers who had promised to be her guides and escort to Ranchero's Rest.

"With those noble men, Lizette, we need have no fear," she said to her maid, following out aloud her train of thought.

"No, ma'm'selle, they are so brave, so good," answered Lizette, who loved the actress too well to leave her, no matter what danger her whims might cause her to go through.

"We are all ready to start, as soon as those heroes in buckskin come for us, Lizette, and I will really enjoy the trip, for we will have a large and comfortable ambulance as a rest, and our horses when we wish to take to the saddle."

"I shall like it, ma'm'selle," replied Lizette.

Rising, Mademoiselle Cleopatra sauntered to the window and glanced out into the plaza below.

Instantly a cry broke from her lips, and in alarm Lizette sprang to her side.

"It is nothing, Lizette—only *that man*."

"The Monsieur Kendall, ma'm'selle?"

"Yes, Lizette."

"Ah, ma'm'selle, would that we were dead."

"Well, Lizette, if he is to dog me this way, I will not suffer longer."

"After I return from the grave of Henry Harcourt, if that man Keene Kendall, my husband though he be, haunts my life as he does, I will come out before the world as I am, and have him arrested and sent to the gallows, for I have the proof to hang him, Lizette!" and the eyes of the beautiful woman burned with a revengeful light.

"It would be better so, ma'm'selle, for he means ma'm'selle only harm."

"I know it, I feel it, for he has proven it."

"But why does he haunt me now?"

"Does he fear that I may betray his crime?"

"He passed across the plaza just now, and was looking up at this window."

"He knows that I am here, and I will be so glad when those noble scouts arrive, for then I shall feel safe; but not until then," and the woman paced the floor nervously for half an hour, when a knock came at the door, and a card was brought in.

Upon it was written:

"GEORGE AND WILLIAM POWELL."

"Thank God, Lizette, they have come!"

CHAPTER XXII.

A PAIR OF VILLAINS.

THE man whom Mademoiselle Cleopatra had seen from her window in the hotel was indeed her husband, Keene Kendall, who was known in San Antonio as Kent.

He had gone to San Antonio under pretense of becoming a ranchero, and he seemed to have plenty of money, and was consequently much sought after.

When it became rumored about that Made-

moiselle Cleopatra was to return to town, he suddenly decided to depart from the hotel where he was stopping, and he sought quarters elsewhere.

It was in these quarters that he had a visitor, about an hour after his having been seen crossing the plaza by his wronged wife.

The visitor was none other than Tiger Tom.

He had just returned from the rendezvous with Ramon Delporte, and he little dreamed of what had taken place since his departure.

He was greeted eagerly by Kent, who quickly said, after he had shaken hands with him:

"Now, Tiger Tom, what news have you?"

"I saw the chief."

"Well?"

"He's willing to do the job and not one will get away, for the lieutenant of the Cowboy Pirates, Juan by name, is to take fourteen men with him, so as to make clean work of it."

"I see; but then you must have some honest hunter or scout to find the ladies so that the death of Mademoiselle Cleopatra can be proven."

"It shall be did, pard."

"Upon her death, you know, I make my ten-strike, for no one knows that we have separated, and more, her father did leave something after all, which I got track of, you know."

"When she is dead I will turn up, and, of course, I get all."

"I see, pard."

"Well, she is here."

"Yes, I heard that, and so are them scouts."

"The Buckskin Brothers?"

"Yes."

"When did they come?"

"A while ago."

"Well, will your men be on hand?"

"They are at the Secret Canyon afore this."

"Good!"

"Then I'll send word to 'em when ther outfit pulls out and I knows which trail they takes."

"I see; but are the scouts alone?"

"You bet no!"

"Who is with them?"

"Ther nigger and ther Injuns."

"Four?"

"Yes, and one more I finds."

"Who?"

"A man ter drive ther ambulance fer ther wimmen-folks, fer it is ter have four horses."

"So many more to be captured?"

"I guess ther horses won't be worth much when Senor Juan and his men gits done firin' on ther outfit!"

"That is so, but let me pay you your money now, for I was to give you half down, you know, in advance, and balance when the work was done."

"I'm willin', pard, and I only wish it were all mine," and Tiger Tom greedily pocketed the crisp bills.

"When do they start, Tom, or do you know?"

"They pull out in the morning, I heerd, but I made myself a leetle skeerce around ther hotel, as yer know them Buckskin Pards kinder thinks I put ther boys up to ther leetle job they went ter play on Broncho Bill when he left here last week."

"Yes, and they did not fetch," was the dry remark of Kent.

"Nary; they got fetched."

"I tell you, Pard Kent, them Buckskin Brothers is harder than winnin' keerls ter rake in!"

"I believe you; but there must be no failure this time."

"I guess ther won't be, for Juan has three men ter one, and then gittin' in a surprise party on one is wuth more nor as many more."

"Will you go, Tom?"

"Pard, I were a-thinkin' I wu'd do so, and maybe it wu'd be a good idee for you to go."

"I would like to do so, but it would be better for me to stay here."

"You c'u'd give out that you was goin' out ter look at a ranch, and I were ter be yer guide."

"Then we'd keep near ther trail and be on hand ter see ther result o' it!"

"You are right, Tom, and I will go, so get me an outfit, for here is the money."

"And, mind you, I want the best!"

"You shall have it, pard," and, taking the money handed to him, Tiger Tom left the room.

The next morning two parties left San Antonio.

One was a large ambulance, drawn by four good mules, and in it, besides the driver, were the actress and Lizette.

Ahead rode Broncho Bill and Night Hawk, side by side, and hitched to the ambulance were two led horses, carrying side-saddles.

Bringing up the rear were Scraps and Red Wolf.

At a fair pace they started upon their perilous trail.

The other party consisted of two men, both splendidly mounted.

These were Tiger Tom and the adventurer, and when they had seen the trail taken by the other outfit, they wheeled their horses off in an oblique direction, and keeping out of sight, rode briskly away over the prairies.

The destination of the leading party was to Ranchero's Rest.

The destination of the two men was to the Secret Canyon, to warn Juan the Cowboy Pirate and his band that their intended victims were on the way.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CLIPPING CLAWS.

THE "Secret Canyon" was a break in the plain which no one would have suspected the existence of without riding very near to it, and the nature of the ground upon either side in the approach was such that no one would care to ride a horse over it except from some good cause.

The canyon was some thirty feet deep and there was a spring in one end which flowed off in a little stream that soon lost itself in the soft earth.

Grass grow about the place in small quantities, and there were a few stunted bushes.

The descent into the canyon was a hazardous one, but it was made in safety by Juan and his outlaws, who then set to work to make themselves as comfortable as possible.

Knowing that the horses would have little to feed upon there, large bundles of prairie grass had been brought by each rider.

At night the cooking was done so that no smoke could be seen, and thus the lawless gang lay waiting the coming of the messenger from Tiger Tom.

A lookout was kept by day, from dawn to dark, seated up at the head of the canyon, where he had a view of the surrounding country for miles.

By night there was no need of any, as no man in his sober senses would attempt to ride over the treacherous ground to the secret canyon.

Two nights had passed away since the arrival of Juan and his men, and the second day was coming near a close when the man on sentinel duty spied two horsemen loom up over the distant prairie.

Instantly he gave the alarm, and the men were all on the alert.

Nearer came the two horsemen and Juan, who had crept to the top of the canyon and was looking at them through his glass, said:

"Yes, they are coming here, and I know one of them."

"We will now have news."

In a little while the horsemen had approached, and Juan met them, saying as he did so:

"Well, Tiger Tom, you are your own messenger?"

"Yes, Senor Juan, I concluded as how I'd come, and this are my pard, Mr. Kent."

"What news have you for me?" asked Juan, when he had shaken hands with Kent, who had, with Tiger Tom, dismounted, for their ponies had been ridden hard.

"The outfit left town, and they has pushed it pretty well; but they camps ter-night in the Graveyard Motte."

"Ah! an excellent place for our work, as we can get upon them almost from the gullies, before we are seen, and we can surround them, as the timber is not half an acre in size and there are divides all around it."

"I am glad that they camp there, Tom."

"Yes, it's a good place for us, but you haven't no time to lose."

"No, I'll get off at once, and you will go I suppose?"

"Waal no, but we won't be far away, you kin bet, ef yer sh'u'd need a extra revolver or so."

"Won't you have some supper, for ours is about ready?"

"Waal yes, we'll hitch our horses off yonder fer a feed and return."

This they did, and Kent quickly made himself "solid" with the cut-throat band by handing out a twenty-dollar bill to each one, while he said:

"This is a reminder, pards, that all that outfit must be wiped out."

"We'll do it," was the response in chorus.

Then the Cowboy Pirates saddled their horses, looked to their arms and just at sunset moved away from the Secret Canyon.

In the rear followed Tiger Tom and Kent, and they dropped slowly back as the band rode on.

Darkness soon settled upon the prairie; but Juan knew the trails well and held on toward the Graveyard Motte, which had been so named from the fact that an emigrant train had been surprised there by Indians and slain, and their bodies were buried in the timber.

As Juan had said the place was an excellent one for a surprise, for three sides, as it rose into a hill of some twenty feet, were water-marshes of considerable depth.

As these gullies extended for considerable distance out upon the prairies, men could approach readily by night within a score of yards of the motte without being seen by crawling upon their hands and knees.

With his men thus near the timber, and by opening a hot fire with rifles upon those encamped therein, and then rushing forward with revolvers, Juan did not doubt but that he could kill the whole party.

It was nearly midnight when the Cowboy Pirates arrived within a mile of the motte.

It was a dark night, slightly clouded, and a glimmer from the timber showed that a camp was there.

Dismounting his men, Juan ordered the horses to be hopped, and then divided the band into three parties of five each.

He took the center party himself, and they all moved forward.

Three gullies were selected, about a hundred feet apart, and crouching low the cut-throats advanced toward the camp.

Juan had told all to be ready to fire when he should give the command.

Thus they moved forward, and soon reached a point but a few yards from the first tree of the motte.

All was silent within, and a glimmering light showed that the camp-fire had nearly died out.

It was too dark for the outlaws to see any forms within the shadows of the grove of timber, and so they selected for their aim a spot about the flickering camp-fire.

A moment of suspense came then, and loud rung Juan's order:

"Fire!"

Fifteen rifles flashed forth within a few seconds of time, and then came rattling shots from those who had repeating-weapons.

"Charge!" yelled the outlaw leader, and with a revolver in each hand, the Cowboy Pirates rushed to the attack.

But not a shot met them, not a cry of fright or of anguish was heard.

"Hold! Cease firing! They are not here," yelled Juan.

Instantly a silence followed.

Then it was broken by a deep voice commanding:

"Hands up all of you, or die!"

The voice came from a gully to one side of the timber, and believing that they had but five men to deal with, Juan ordered:

"Charge them, men!"

Instantly there flashed forth a volley—then another.

It was the fire of platoons, and four or five outlaws dropped in their tracks.

"Up, soldiers, and at them!"

It was the same deep voice that had given the order before and in response a cheer was heard and a score of men sprung from out the ground, it seemed, and rushed toward the bewildered Cowboy Pirates.

There were wild yells of alarm, some scattering shots, and the outlaws were in wild flight back to their horses.

Two-thirds of their number reached the animals, and springing into their saddles darted away.

But hot upon their track came four horsemen.

"Heaven have mercy! they are the Buckskin Pards," cried Juan, and in terror he and his men urged their horses on.

Then began a running fight between outlaws fugitives and their four pursuers, who were Night Hawk, Broncho Bill, Scraps and Red Wolf.

Here a saddle was emptied, there a horse went down, and so it continued until two of the pursuers had dropped out of the race, one with a dead horse, the other wounded.

"Come, Scraps, we must go back and see to Will and Red Wolf, for those fellows have had their claws clipped in a manner they will never forget," said Night Hawk Powell to his negro companion.

"All right, Massa George, I'se willin', sah, for I think we has did 'em up prime," replied the negro.

Back over the trail they rode, while the half-dozen outlaws who had escaped, went flying

along like mad, for they had indeed had their claws clipped.

But as they rode along, Night Hawk and Scraps came upon a wounded man.

Instantly they dismounted, and the scout asked:

"Well, who are you?"

"Juan, they call me, and I was leader of the gang you so nearly wiped out."

"Ah! you are an American, whom I have heard was lieutenant of the Cowboy Pirates?"

"Yes, I am an American, and I deserve my fate."

"Who I am matters not, for I am wiped out, and so let it be."

"I will carry you to our camp, and perhaps I can save your life."

"Oh, no, not to be hanged."

"I have three wounds in my body, and I will not live long, so let me die in peace."

"I will do so; but is there nothing that I can do for you?" kindly asked the scout.

No answer came, and leaning over as he knelt by his side, Night Hawk said:

"He was right, Scraps, for he is dead."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE SCOUT'S RUSE.

FROM the very first Night Hawk and Broncho Bill had plotted to destroy the Cowboy Pirates who meant to attack them for the purpose of killing Mademoiselle Cleopatra and Lizette, and wiping them out of existence.

They had accordingly taken Major Loring and his troopers to a convenient hiding-place, and then had gone on to the town after the actress and her maid.

The party had started out, as the reader has seen, and though Tiger Tom and Kent did not suspect it there was one watching their movements.

That was Buckskin Sam, a friend of the Powells, and a Texan ranger who is known to fame.*

Buckskin Sam, at the request of the Powells watched on their trail after their departure.

He saw Tiger Tom and Kent closely tracking them, until they discovered what trail they meant to take, when they rode briskly away toward the westward.

This showed to Buckskin Sam that they were going to inform their comrades of the trail taken by the Buckskin Brothers, and, knowing the country as he did, he decided at once that the outlaws were lying in wait at the Secret Canyon.

Rapidly he rode on then after the Buckskin Scouts and made known his discovery, after which he returned to town, where he was engaged on special duty and could not leave for any length of time.

Thus forewarned the Buckskin Scouts laid their plans accordingly.

They felt sure that the outlaws would gauge their speed and make the Graveyard Motte the point of attack, where they naturally would suppose they would camp.

That this was the case has been seen.

Major Loring and his troopers were just about ten miles from the Graveyard Motte, and Red Wolf was sent ahead to tell the major to go there and to keep well hidden in the motte.

It was just before sunset when the little party reached the motte, and Major Loring came forward and was introduced to Mademoiselle Cleopatra and Lizette, and gave them a hearty greeting.

Then he asked:

"Well, my friends, what is your plan?"

"Major, there has been a spy upon us, perhaps, to note if we camp here, and he will so report it."

"Now, as soon as it is dark, I wish the ambulance to pull out, and will ask you for a guard of six soldiers under the sergeant to escort it to a bit of timber about three miles from here."

"Certainly, Night Hawk."

"The horses can also be taken there, excepting your own and ours, and the men can hide in the gullies to the east, for we will be attacked from the westward."

"We can make our horses lie down in the gullies, and there we can wait for our foes."

"A small fire can be built to lead them on, and when they make their attack we can make ours."

"Do you like the plan, Major Loring?"

"Excellently well."

"It is just the thing."

"Will and myself talked it over, sir, and it is

about the best way for us to do most damage and suffer less ourselves.

"The mademoiselle and Lizette will not be in any danger, your troopers' horses will be also away, and our animals, and all of us will be protected in the gullies."

"They will have, with that man Kent and Tiger Tom, seventeen men, rather a strong force; but we will equal them, not counting the sergeant and his six troopers."

"We will give them a lesson they will never forget, and I only wish I had men enough to surround and capture the whole band," said Major Loring with enthusiasm.

And so it was arranged, the ambulance pulling out of the motte just after nightfall, and the sergeant and his six men following with the led horses.

The driver of the vehicle was an old prairie-man and knew the motte well to which Night Hawk had directed him, and they reached it without accident and went silently into camp.

The sergeant arranged a comfortable place for Mademoiselle Cleopatra and her maid, and they ate their supper in darkness and silence.

But they did not retire.

They could not, suffering the suspense that they did.

They sat together talking in low tones, and the actress called the sergeant to come near and asked him many questions, all talking in the same hushed tones.

Thus the time passed away until midnight came.

Far off over the prairie they knew where lay the Graveyard Motte, and their eyes were fixed upon it, though in the darkness they could not see it.

Suddenly a succession of bright flames shot out over the prairie, and then came the rapid rattle of fire-arms.

"It is fearful! fearful!" cried the beautiful actress, while Lizette burst into tears.

It was not long that the hot firing lasted, and then the sergeant cried:

"See those flashes out over the prairie."

"The outlaws are flying and the Buckskin Brothers are in chase, for they alone were mounted."

Then rung out a cheer from the group of soldiers, and with a will did the actress and Lizette join.

Then all waited, for the suspense had come once more, for who of their number had fallen under that hot fire.

It was not very long, though it seemed an age before a shadowy form of horse and rider appeared upon the plains.

Nearer he came, and then he halted, while a soldier sprung to his bridle-rein.

"It is the major," said the sergeant.

It was the major, and he had come to relieve the minds of the beautiful woman and Lizette.

"Oh, sir, what is the result?" cried Mademoiselle Cleopatra.

"Thanks to those gallant Boys in Buckskin, madam, we have won."

"But some are dead, some are wounded?"

"Yes, the outlaws lost their leader, and more than half his men were also killed, and others doubtless wounded, though they escaped."

"And on our side?"

"What of our friends?"

"One of my brave soldiers was killed and several slightly wounded."

"Then there was Broncho Bill slightly hurt, by his horse being shot under him, and Red Wolf was wounded in the arm."

"Fortunately we have gotten off well."

"Thank Heaven!" came fervently from the lips of the woman, and, as there was no such thing as sleep there, the horses were hitched to the ambulance and the party started for the Graveyard Motte.

The next day the actress gladly yielded up her ambulance to the wounded, and rode on bareback, while half-a-dozen of the horses left by the outlaws having been caught, there were enough animals for all to have a mount.

As for the Ranchero's Rest Major Loring went with his troopers as an escort, and then he bade farewell to the party, for both Night Hawk and Broncho Bill assured him there was no longer any danger from either outlaws or Comanches, and the officer was anxious to return to the ruin for Celina Delporte and take her on to the fort.

Broncho Bill had not been much hurt by his fall, and Red Wolf's wound seemed not to trouble him, so the quartette were as good as ever, and with Ribbon Joe the ambulance driver they felt that they need have no dread of anything less than a large force of red-skins.

Alone did the woman, who had given up her heart's idol, at her father's command, go to the

* Buckskin Sam—Major Sam S. Hall—of Texas, died a few months ago.—THE AUTHOR.

grave at the head of which stood the board in which was skillfully cut:

"MARS' HENRY."

It was the work of the faithful negro, and deeply did it touch the sorrowing woman as she knelt by the side of the sacred spot.

For two days did the little party linger at Rancho's Rest, and then they set out upon their return.

Without accident they arrived there, and the actress and Lizette bade farewell to their devoted friends, the Quartette in Buckskin, as Made-moiselle Cleopatra called the brothers, the negro and the Indian, and departed for new scenes of triumphs before the footlights, though her heart was away at the lonely grave of Henry Harcourt.

Before her departure Night Hawk and Broncho Bill pledged their word that they would keep Keene Kendall from longer dogging her tracks through the country, and not long after she received a letter to the effect that he would trouble her no more.

Why, the next chapter will reveal.

CHAPTER XXV.

A MESSAGE FROM THE DEAD.

WHEN the outlaws under Juan were approaching the Graveyard Motte upon their murderous mission, two horsemen sat afar off upon their horses awaiting the result.

Those two were Tiger Tom, and his red-hearted pard, Kent.

They had approached as near as they dared, and were anxious to know the result of the attack, though they had no dread that it would be other than a complete annihilation of the Buckskin Brothers and their companions.

Breathlessly they awaited, and it seemed that the minutes dragged out into hours.

At last came the flashing and the rattle of the rifles, and a yell of triumph broke from the lips of Kent.

Then the revolvers flashed and cracked and Tiger Tom said with enthusiasm:

"There won't one of 'em live through that fire."

But suddenly a flame shot forth from beyond the revolver flashes, and Tiger Tom cried in alarm:

"Them's muskets!"

"Muskets?"

"Yas, pards, thar is soldiers thar."

"Ther boys has jumped ther wrong camp."

"Curses!" came from the lips of Kent.

"See thar! our boys is missing."

"Let's head 'em, and keep well in advance."

This they did, and when Tiger Tom saw that the pursuit had ceased they drew rein.

Soon a horseman came sweeping along.

"Ho, pard, what are up?" cried Tiger Tom.

"Senor Juan and our gang are wiped out," was the reply.

"Who did it?"

"The Buckskins!"

"Thar was soldiers thar."

"Yas, a hundred of 'em, I guesses; but ther Buckskins was thar too, for them two scouts, ther nigger and ther Injun came in chase, as I seen by ther flashes o' their weapons."

The man swept on, for he seemed anxious not to tarry.

"Then others came up until six had passed."

"Them is all."

"Ther rest has gone under," said Tiger Tom, who had heard the same story from each one.

"Well, our road leads back to town," said Kent.

"Not much."

"Why not?"

"Them Buckskins is onter us, and they has got it down fine, I tell yer, and I goes ter consult Captain San Cruz before I goes back to that town."

"Would you desert me?"

"Oh no, and you'd better not desert me, but don't yer go ter town until we knows how things is."

"How can we find out?"

"Thar is boys thar as will fetch word to ther cap'n."

"You know best, so lead on."

Tiger Tom did so, and they kept on at a steady pace.

Camping when they had to for rest, they held back out of sight of the outlaws ahead, and at last reached the canyon where Tiger Tom had always secretly met his chief.

He did not expect a letter in the crevice of the rock, and yet he felt there and drew one out.

To his surprise it was addressed to him and in the chief's handwriting, and it contained some-

thing which, upon opening the envelope caused the spy to say:

"Why it's ther chief's ring."

Then he glanced at the letter and handed it to Kent with the remark:

"Read it, pard, for you is more eddicated than me."

Kent did read it, and it was as follows:

"PARD TOM:—

"In a few moments I am to die.

"On my way back to go to the river, I was captured by the Buckskin Brothers, who lariatied me from the top of the canyon.

"Major Loring was with them, and had with him a number of soldiers.

"The Buckskin Brothers had been hiding in the rocks and heard all we said.

"They had been there in hiding the last time we met in the canyon, and also heard what was said.

"I write this to warn you, for they will capture you if you don't leave town; and they know the racket of your pard Kent, so he had better skip, too, if he values his neck.

"Tell him to join our band, what is left, for the Buckskins will surely wipe out Juan and his gang.

"I make you chief in my place, and give you my ring as proof of my words.

"Major Loring, upon his honor, sends this unopened to the place where you get it, and he acts nobly by me, for he allows me to be shot instead of hanged.

"I have lost, and Celina Delporte wins.

"So be it."

"You will find my grave over in the third canyon.

"Adios, Tiger Tom, and if you do not avenge me, I will haunt you to your dying day.

"Mark my words, I leave you a command to avenge me.

"Your chief,

"SAN CRUZ."

This letter caused the faces of both men to blanch.

For some moments they did not speak, and then Tiger Tom said:

"Let us go to that grave."

He led the way, and the grave was soon found.

Not content, he threw out the earth, unfolded the blanketed form, and said:

"It is ther chief."

"Well?"

"Pard, we turns outlaw, for sart'in."

"There is no other course at present," was the bitter reply of the man who felt that he had played for a high stake and lost.

"No, we has ter git, that is sart'in, unless we wishes ter keep company with ther cap'n."

"I have no such desire, Tiger Tom."

"You bet I hain't, so here goes for t'other side o' ther Rio Grande and ther Cowboy Pirits for pards."

With that they rode away, and soon after it became known, from a captured outlaw, that Tiger Tom and the man Kent had joined the outlaw band, and thus it was that Night Hawk and Broncho Bill had written to the wife of Keene Kendall that she had naught more to fear from him.

THE END.

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BEADLE AND ADAMS, Publishers,
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